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FAITH

"The Words of This Life"

AFFIRMATION & CRITIQUE

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FAITH

"The Words of This Life" Series

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

faith (fāth) *noun*

1. a. Belief in God or in a set of religious doctrines.
b. A set of religious doctrines; a body of dogma…
American Heritage Dictionary (5th ed.)
(https://ahdictionary.com)

As far as the English language is concerned, these definitions from *American Heritage Dictionary* are correct and probably accord with our own personal understandings of the word *faith*. Most English speakers recognize a subjective aspect of faith—believing in something—and an objective aspect—the something believed. The problem is, according to the New Testament, faith in its subjective aspect is not simply belief, and in its objective aspect, not at all doctrines or dogma. So much for English-language dictionaries as far as Christian truth is concerned. We should let the Bible define what *faith* means, and in this issue of *A&C* we will do that.

Faith characterizes not only God's New Testament believers (those who have faith) but also what God does in His New Testament economy ("which is in faith"—1 Tim. 1:4). We devote one article to what subjective faith is and is not, and another to what objective faith ("the faith") is and is not. In the third article we unpack the crucial expression "God's economy, which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4) and show the principle of faith operating in the carrying out of God's eternal purpose. Then, we follow with an article on what living by faith means practically in our Christian experience and church life. In the next two articles we present that great benefit of faith, that is, the victory of our faith, and that great responsibility to faith, that is, our properly contending for it. In the last article, we consider the unique sin of unbelief, which not only condemns the unbelievers but also easily besets even us as believers and must be attended to soberly. At the end of the issue we consider historically that strange but unique phrase in the New Testament *believe into*, and we review two significant books regarding faith. Our sincere hope is that this issue will be a great service to the faith of all our readers (Phil. 2:17). May it be so by the Lord's mercy.

"The Words of This Life"

About This Series

This issue of *Affirmation & Critique* is part of a series called "The Words of This Life," a title taken from Acts 5:20. While we may be pressing the literal meaning of this expression, we wish to indicate that there are certain key words that signify important aspects of our Christian life and our church life and that these key words are, for the most part, common to all New Testament believers. However, we are also acutely aware that across the millennia many of the common words of this life have been understood variously by the different Christian traditions. Examples abound: *faith, eternal life, grace, oneness, glory, church, worship*. At first blush, words like these may seem to be simple and to have only one possible meaning (that is, the one in our own minds). But the facts of history make clear that many of these words mean immensely different things to Christians of different traditions, and it is worthwhile to consider whether to accept the traditional meanings or not, especially in light of a careful consideration of the Scriptures. To this end, in the issues of this series we will focus on some of the words of this life, considering their meanings from both biblical and traditional perspectives. Sometimes these perspectives will match; sometimes they will not. But our hope is that in our presentation the biblical perspective will be accurately relayed and will confirm, establish, and enrich—and perhaps even test and adjust—our readers' understanding of these crucial words that relate to our Christian life and church life. May the Lord make us sufficient for these things.

What Is FAITH?

Tony H. Espinosa • Martin H. Fuller • Mitchell J. Kennard • John-Paul Petrash

The question this article seeks to answer may seem like a question that does not even need to be asked. The general idea of faith has become so common that for many people it does not immediately elicit further consideration. However, many have written extensively on the matter of faith, with varying levels of understanding and, in our view, varying degrees of success.

Some teachers propagate notions of faith that are without scriptural warrant and even stray into absurdity. For example, Joel Osteen, the Houston-based prosperity preacher, teaches that faith is the power to unlock the abundant, mostly material blessings that God is waiting to bestow on us. He writes, "You believed, but you didn't get the promotion. You believed, but you didn't qualify for the new home. Keep believing. God has something better coming" (21). Liberal theologians such as Paul Tillich (d. 1965) and Gordon D. Kaufman (d. 2011) offer definitions of faith that may appeal to philosophers of religion but are not grounded in the teaching of the New Testament. Tillich famously writes that "faith is the state of being ultimately concerned" (1). Kaufman contends that "true faith in God" means to go out "like Abraham (as Hebrews 11:8 puts it) not really knowing where we are going, but nevertheless moving forward creatively and with confidence" (106). Osteen, Kaufman, and Tillich's understandings of faith do not approach the revelation of the New Testament, yet some genuine believers in Christ have been beguiled by such understandings.

Other teachers give orthodox definitions of faith, but those definitions sometimes emphasize mere assent or trust in biblical doctrines as the function of faith and do not probe the deeper, more subjective aspect of faith conveyed in the New Testament. Examples abound, but two will suffice here to make the point. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) teaches that "the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God" (*LETA* 17:36). The Baptist theologian Wayne Grudem teaches that "saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God" (862). While it is certainly right to believe what God has revealed and to trust in the finished work of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, there remains the possibility that one may believe in a doctrine and trust in a person without receiving the person of whom the doctrine testifies.

Thankfully, some teachers go beyond mere assent or trust to teach that faith is a receiving of Christ and of all spiritual realities in Him. We will see a number of teachers who view faith from this perspective later in this article, but here we wish to offer a quotation from Witness Lee that positions us to explore the biblical teaching of faith in more detail in the section that follows:

> According to common understanding, faith means to believe, to depend on, and to trust in, but in the New Testament, faith means to receive. This differs from the common understanding of faith. The Bible says, "As many as received Him,…to those who believe into His name" (John 1:12). To believe in Jesus is not merely to believe that He exists and that He is truly the Savior who was crucified to accomplish redemption for us; it is not merely to believe and be convinced of these facts. This type of believing or being convinced is inadequate. This is not the faith referred to in the Bible. The faith referred to in the Bible is to receive, that is, to receive the One in whom we believe into us, to receive the facts that we believe into us. When we believe, we receive Jesus Christ, and we also receive the redemption that He accomplished for us on the cross. Therefore, according to the Bible, faith means to receive. We believe and are convinced because we have received. (*CWWL, 1985* 2:141)

Faith as Substantiation: a Biblical Presentation

"Now faith is the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1)

For as long as the Bible has been interpreted, there has been broad recognition that Hebrews 11:1 offers the closest thing to a definition of *faith* in the New Testament. We readily admit that there are elements of assent and of trust in faith—and we suspect that both are included in the word *conviction* mentioned in the latter half of the verse. But we contend that these are not the heart of the matter, for before this verse speaks of faith as "conviction," it speaks of faith as "substantiation." The Greek word underlying "substantiation" is ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*), a word clearly in the domain not of knowing or of trusting but of reality, its basic sense being "the essential or basic structure/nature of an entity, *substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality*" (Bauer et al. s.v. "ὑπόστασις"). Earlier in Hebrews this same Greek word is used to describe the Son as "the effulgence of [God's] glory and the impress of His substance" (Heb. 1:3). The Son is the "impress" of the Father's "substance [*hypostasis*]," and as anyone familiar with the history of trinitarian thought will know, this Greek word was taken up by the early church in its confession that God is three hypostases (or persons) in one nature (or essence). The word *hypostasis*, then, is clearly in the domain of reality.

Modern English translations of Hebrews 11:1 have overwhelmingly opted to translate *hypostasis* as "assurance," putting it in the cognitive domain, but this was not the understanding of the earliest interpreters of the Bible or of earlier English translations, and not all contemporary Greek scholars are assured that the modern shift was a change for the better (see, for instance, Attridge 308-310; Attridge translates the phrase "faith is the reality of things hoped for" [305]). The Greek fathers in particular, who read the New Testament in its original language, rightly intuited this verse to mean that faith perceives the invisible, unseen, spiritual realities and makes them real in some way or even is their reality (Mathis 12-48). Faith, of course, does not make these hidden realities real in themselves; it makes them real in the believers. All the real things, according to the New Testament, are hidden, unseen, and imperceptible to the senses. God is "the reality" (John 14:6; 1 John 5:6), and His people have their source in "the reality" (Eph. 4:24). These realities cannot be grasped by our senses, but they can be realized by our faith. There is, then, a basic relationship between faith and reality (2 Thes. 2:13).

This realizing capacity of faith does not simply enable the believers to perceive the real things; it also brings the perceived things into the believers and makes them operative in their being. Faith does not simply assent to the proposition *Christ rose from the dead* (Rom. 10:9); faith also perceives Christ's resurrection itself and brings the resurrected Christ into the believers, thus making His resurrection an operative and effective principle in their subjective experience (Col. 2:12). This, we contend, is the primary function of faith. Faith not only assents and trusts; faith perceives, receives, and realizes all the hidden realities in God's economy, which is "in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4). It does this primarily by laying hold of Christ, for reality came "through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), Christ came "full of…reality" (John 1:14), the reality is "in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21), and Jesus Christ Himself is "the reality" (John 14:6). All the hidden, spiritual realities in God's economy are embodied in Christ, and faith lays hold on these realities by laying hold of Christ Himself and making Christ with all that He is, all that He has, and all that He has done and attained real within the believers.

> "To believe in Jesus is not merely to believe that He exists and that He is truly the Savior who was crucified to accomplish redemption for us; it is not merely to believe and be convinced of these facts. This type of believing or being convinced is inadequate. This is not the faith referred to in the Bible." —Witness Lee

The New Testament gives ample evidence that God has put all spiritual realities into Christ. Most fundamentally, He has embodied Himself in Christ: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9; cf. 1:19). As the embodiment of God, Christ has the divine, eternal, uncreated life of the Father "in Himself" (John 5:26; cf. 1:4; Rom. 6:23; 2 Tim. 1:1), and this life in Christ is also light (John 1:4), so that Christ can say of Himself, "I am…the life" (John 11:25; 14:6) and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5; cf. 11:9). Paul also describes Christ as the One "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden"

(Col. 2:3). Moreover, Paul speaks of "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39), "the grace which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1), and "the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15), sometimes identifying more than one of these elements together as being "in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13). Not only are these marvelous attributes and virtues in Christ; so too is God's entire saving operation with respect to humankind, for Paul speaks not only of "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24) but also of "the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:10). The redemption needed by the believers to solve the problem of sin and the salvation needed to bring them all the way to glory are not simply accomplished *by* Christ; redemption and salvation themselves exist "in Christ" as their realm and sphere of execution. And these are only some of the spiritual realities embodied in Christ. In summative statements indicating that the scope of these realities is indefinable, Paul says

> The Greek word underlying "substantiation" in Hebrews 11:1 is *hypostasis*, a word clearly in the domain not of knowing or of trusting but of reality, its basic sense being "the essential or basic structure/nature of an entity, *substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality*."

that God will fill the Philippians' "every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19) and that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). To be sure, Christ is the embodiment of all spiritual realities and the focal point of every action in God's eternal economy. To participate in the content and working out of God's economy, then, we must substantiate Christ as the reality of every spiritual blessing therein.

How, then, do we access, lay hold of, and substantiate all these riches embodied in Christ? We substantiate them by faith, for faith's most profound work is to bring us into an organic union with Christ. The New Testament occasionally speaks of believing "in" (ἐν, *en*) Christ, but it more often speaks of believing "into" (εἰς, *eis*) Christ, a distinctive New Testament phrase used by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter (see the Milestones article [84-91 in this issue]). We come to be "in Christ" (that beloved phrase of Paul) by believing into Him, and because believing brings us into union with Christ, it is through believing that we receive and substantiate all the spiritual realities embodied in Him.

The New Testament strongly testifies of this uniting function of faith, speaking of faith as that by which we not only believe certain things about Christ and the Spirit but also receive Christ Himself and receive the Spirit Himself. John equates "those who believe into His name" with those who "received Him" (John 1:12), and Paul tells the Colossians that through "the solid basis of [their] faith" they had "received the Christ" and should therefore go on to be "established in the faith" by walking in the Christ whom they had received (Col. 2:5-7). Further, Paul says that "through faith" the believers "receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:14), and he makes it abundantly clear earlier in the chapter that this promise of the Spirit is nothing other than the promised Spirit Himself, for he asks the Galatians rhetorically whether they had received the Spirit "out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2). Faith is thus not simply the prerequisite condition for receiving Christ and receiving the Spirit. Faith is that act by which the believers actually receive Christ and the Spirit, taking Them in subjectively, and thus substantiating all that They are and have.

This realization regarding the intrinsic work of faith to usher the believers into an organic union with Christ Himself and thus to substantiate all the riches embodied in Him sheds much light on a curious feature of the New Testament: on the one hand, all spiritual blessings are secured "in Christ"; on the other hand, all spiritual blessings are secured "through faith." Christ is the One "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14; cf. Eph. 1:7), and yet forgiveness of sins is promised to "everyone who believes" (Acts 10:43). Why? Because through faith we are brought into union with Christ and thus substantiate the forgiveness of sins in Him. Salvation is "in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:10), and yet we "have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Why? Because through faith we are brought into union with Christ and therefore substantiate the salvation that is in Him. We are "justified in Christ" (Gal. 2:17), and yet we are "justified by faith" (Rom. 3:28). Why? Because through faith we

are brought into union with Christ and therefore substantiate the righteousness that is in Him, indeed, the very righteousness that He Himself is (1 Cor. 1:30). The eternal life is "in His Son" and "he who has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:11-12), and yet we "have life…by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Why? Because by faith we are brought into union with Christ and thereby substantiate the eternal life in Him, indeed, the eternal life that Christ Himself is (John 11:25). We are sanctified "in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2), and yet we are sanctified "by faith" (Acts 26:18). Why? Because by faith we are brought into union with Christ and therefore substantiate the sanctification that is in Him, indeed, the very holiness that He Himself is (1 Cor. 1:30).

In several instances the connection between faith's union with Christ and faith's substantiation of the riches in Christ is made explicitly by the text itself. In Acts 10:43 Paul says that "everyone who believes into Him will receive forgiveness of sins." We receive forgiveness of sins not simply because we believe but because we believe *into* an organic union with Him. In Acts 26:18 Paul speaks of "those who have been sanctified by faith in [lit., into] Me." We are sanctified not simply because we believe but because our faith is *into* Christ. In John 6:40 the Lord says that the will of the Father is that "everyone who beholds the Son and believes into Him should have eternal life." We have eternal life not simply because we believe but because we believe *into* an organic union with Him.

Faith perceives the divine realities, including all the experiences of Christ in His human living, and brings them into the believers, making those realities operative in the believers' inner being.

Faith also substantiates Christ's history, thus making it our experience. Through the faith that joins us to Christ, His experiences of death, burial, resurrection, and ascension become our experiences in the organic union. As we have seen, faith perceives the divine realities, including all the experiences of Christ in His human living, and brings them into the believers, making those realities operative in the believers' inner being. Paul believed that Christ had been crucified objectively and that His death by crucifixion was "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3; 2:2, 8; 2 Cor. 13:4). However, Paul also recognized that "our old man has been crucified with [Christ]" subjectively (Rom. 6:6), and he laid hold of that co-crucifixion as an experiential reality by the faith of the One who had been crucified for him (Gal. 2:20). Further, the effectiveness of Christ's death operated in Paul to crucify the world in his experience (Gal. 6:14; Col. 2:20), and he declares that our co-crucifixion with Christ positions us to crucify the flesh "with its passions and its lusts" (Gal. 5:24; cf. Rom. 8:13). Having died with Christ (2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 3:3), we are also buried with Him through baptism and raised with Him "through the faith of the operation of God" (Col. 2:12; cf. Rom. 6:4), that is, through the living faith produced by God's operation in us. Further, we are "dead to the law" and are now "joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead" (Rom. 7:4), implying once again the organic union with Christ for our resurrection with Him. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul ties together the notions of death, resurrection, and faith in his experience and the experiences of those with him. It was by exercising their spirit of faith and speaking according to what they believed, as the psalmist did, that they experienced the death of Jesus subjectively for the manifestation of the life of Jesus in their mortal flesh in the midst of all their afflictions (2 Cor. 4:10-14). And it is in the organic union that God has not only "raised us up together with [Christ]" but has also "seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). In fact, the very power that God "caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies" is "toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19-20). Faith, therefore, does not simply believe that Christ resurrected and ascended; faith substantiates the power that operated to accomplish the resurrection and ascension in Christ and makes it operative in the subjective experience of the believers (Eph. 2:5-6). In short, we can experience the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ subjectively by laying hold of Him through faith.

Ultimately, faith substantiates not only all the realities embodied in Christ and the whole history of His human living, death, resurrection, and ascension but, even more profoundly, the person of Christ Himself as He lives and moves within us day by day. Initially, this union with Christ occurs through the hearing of faith, whereby we hear the word proclaimed, believe into Christ, and receive Him into our being (Rom. 10:12-17).

But it is also by faith that Christ continues to live in us and to occupy our inner being, as Paul indicates: "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:17). For Christ to make His home in our hearts through faith requires that He be given the ground to live as faith in us so that the life we live is not according to our faith but according to Him as our faith. Paul conveys this marvelously in a well-known verse that captures the essence of his living: "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By being brought into union with the person of Christ Himself and thereby substantiating the reality of His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, Paul was able to live as one with Christ, allowing Christ to live in him and with him. This was not an exchanged life in which Paul disappeared and Christ came in. It was a grafted life in which the old, terminated Paul no longer lived, but the new, resurrected Paul continued to have one life and one living with Christ in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). This living was "in faith, the faith of the Son of God" and could be carried out only by such faith. In Paul's experience—as it must be in ours—faith substantiated the person of the God-man and the living of that wonderful person.

Anyone who lives by faith in this way—receiving Christ, partaking of all the riches embodied in Him, experiencing all the processes of death, resurrection, and ascension in Him, and substantiating the person of Christ Himself in His living and moving within them—will undoubtedly exhibit various other subsidiary acts that fall under the general description of faith in the New Testament. They will believe what God has revealed in His Word; they will trust in Christ for salvation and for their daily living; they will intuit the will of God in fellowship with Christ and thus pray in faith to release what God has willed on the earth. All these activities, and many more, are associated with faith in the New Testament (indeed, Paul calls the whole activity of the Christian life a "work of faith"—1 Thes. 1:3), but they are not themselves the essence of faith. The essence of faith is union, reception, and substantiation. All these other acts come out of and are sustained by this deeper work of faith, and without this deeper work of faith, all these secondary acts and works of faith are ephemeral at best. To use some mundane illustrations, we cannot simply produce the belief that a building stands before us when there is none. Even if we could, this belief would be but a figment of our imagination. And yet if we substantiate a building before us by the sense of sight, we spontaneously believe that a building stands before us. Likewise, we cannot generate trust in a person we know to be untrustworthy. And yet our living contact with a trustworthy person spontaneously instills in us a trust in that person. We cannot simply produce confidence that someone will do what we ask him or her to do, and yet if we know by living contact with some person that he or she in fact does intend to do something, we cannot but be confident that he or she will in fact do it if we ask. In our living contact with Christ Himself, faith works the same way. We do not believe in the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension simply because the Bible records them; we believe these things because we have substantiated by our faith the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. We do not trust in Christ simply because the Bible teaches that He is trustworthy but because we have substantiated by our faith the trustworthy Christ Himself. We do not believe that what we pray for He will do simply because we have prayed it but because in our fellowship with Him we have intuited what He Himself intends to do.

The essence of faith is union, reception, and substantiation. All the other, secondary acts of faith come out of and are sustained by this deeper work of faith, and without this deeper work of faith, all these secondary acts and works of faith are ephemeral at best.

This substantiating function of faith has been seen by many teachers across the Christian traditions, as we will see later in this article. But the two predominant accounts of faith offered by the Christian traditions are that faith is essentially assent and that faith is essentially trust, and these we should consider first.

Assent and Trust: an Evaluation of Two Predominant Views of Faith

Standing in contrast to the biblical view of faith presented

above are two other views common among Christians. The first—that faith is essentially assent—is the established position of the Catholic Church. The second—that faith is essentially trust—is perhaps the standard view across the Protestant traditions. It is thus common for both Catholics and Protestants to claim that the whole conflict between them (at least as it relates to faith) can be boiled down to whether faith is the mere intellectual assent of the mind or, in addition, the confident trust of the heart. Although neither the Catholic nor Protestant view is wrong, both clearly fall short of the biblical view, for neither assent nor trust necessarily entails union with Christ.

Regarding the first view, the Catholic Church teaches that faith, at its essence, is the assent of the mind to divine teaching, which involves understanding the divine teaching, agreeing with it, and judging it to be true. In this primarily intellectual view of faith, the object of faith is not Jesus Christ the person but divine teaching. Although this view can readily be found in the patristic period, it became the predominant and central view of faith during the medieval period, when systematic theology as a discipline was born. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, provides the following classic definition of faith, as we saw above: "The act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God" (*LETA* 17:36). This understanding of faith eventually became dogma at the First Vatican Council (1869-1870):

> The Catholic Church professes that this faith, which is the beginning of man's salvation is a supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because the intrinsic truth of things is recognized by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither err nor deceive. (*DH* §3008)

Since the time of this council, whose proclamations are considered infallible by Catholics, this understanding has stood as the definition of faith for billions of people. More recent Catholic presentations of faith reiterate this definition, as seen in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*" (para. 150). Here, although "personal adherence" is added to the definition of faith, the catechism nevertheless reaffirms the core meaning of faith—"*free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*." In Catholic understanding to this day, faith remains primarily an act of the intellect.

While we grant that faith involves believing certain things about God and His works, defining faith as an intellectual activity is clearly insufficient. As we have emphasized in the biblical presentation, to believe is to receive Christ, to substantiate Christ, and to be united organically to Christ. The faith described in the New Testament has as its primary object not divine teaching but the person of Jesus Christ Himself, and while we can assent to the things that someone teaches, it does not make much sense to speak of assenting to a person. Our assent to someone's teaching, of course, does not entail our union with that person. When we say, in common parlance, that we believe what someone has taught us, we assent to what they have taught, but we are not thus brought into union with the teacher. Assent to teaching is thus possible without personal union, and therefore, assent cannot be the essence of New Testament faith.

> Reducing faith to mere mental assent leaves open the dangerous possibility that one could believe the teachings of Christianity without ever receiving Christ Himself and thus without ever receiving all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ.

This insufficient understanding can open the door to a particularly vacuous type of "faith," illustrated by a story told by Martin Luther (d. 1546) about a collier, or coal miner:

> The story is told that a doctor of theology, meeting a collier on the bridge at Prague and taking into account that he was but a poor layman, asked him: "My good man, what do you believe?" The collier answered: "I believe what the Church believes." The doctor: "And what does the Church believe?" The collier: "The Church believes what I believe." (quoted in Pieper 2:429n55)

In this story it is difficult to say exactly what the collier believes. Does he believe for example that God is triune, or that Christ is God incarnated? The collier may

not even know that there are such truths. He simply assents to whatever the church says, and for him that is sufficient. Is this saving faith? Hardly, but it is assent to divine teaching through the medium of the Catholic Church, which Catholics believe to be infallible. Some Catholics, of course, would argue that this collier does not exhibit true faith, and we admit that this story is extreme. But for many Catholics the collier's faith does indeed suffice, for Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254) fully endorses such faith when he writes:

> There is a certain body of the faith to which everyone is bound, and which is sufficient for the simple and, perhaps, for all laymen, *i.e.*, that every adult believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of all the good. Likewise must all believe the other articles *implicitly*, *i.e.*, that everything which the universal church believes is true. (quoted in Seeberg 2:90)

Regardless of what one thinks of the collier's faith or of the writings of this pope, these examples share with even the most erudite Catholic definitions of faith a common core—that faith is essentially assent.

One can trust in Christ without necessarily receiving and being united to Him; therefore, trust cannot be the essence of New Testament faith.

This collier's faith is clearly assent of some kind and yet is just as clearly not the faith that the New Testament speaks of. Reducing faith to mere mental assent thus leaves open the dangerous possibility that one could believe the teachings of Christianity without ever receiving Christ Himself and thus without ever receiving all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ.

Protestants were also unsatisfied with this view and have continued using the collier's story as an example of the inherent shortcomings of defining faith as assent. As an alternative, numerous Protestant theologians have contended that faith involves not only the assent of the mind but also trust. In one of the earliest and most influential Lutheran systematic theologies, Philipp Melanchthon (d. 1560) says that "faith (*fides*) is assenting to the entire Word of God as it is given to us, particularly to the free promise of reconciliation given for the sake of Christ the Mediator, and it is trust (*fiducia*) in the mercy of God promised for the sake of Christ the Mediator" (152). This has remained the classical Lutheran understanding of faith, as Francis Pieper (d. 1931), a prominent Lutheran theologian, recognized:

> The Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and the Lutheran teachers…teach most emphatically that confidence in the grace of God acquired by Christ and offered in the Gospel is the very thing by which faith is justifying faith…The Apology [of the Augsburg Confession] says: "Faith is not only knowledge in the intellect, but also confidence in the will, i.e., it is to wish and to receive that which is offered in the promise, namely, reconciliation and remission of sins"…
>
> …The Lutheran dogmaticians from Chemnitz to Hollaz have devoted much attention to this point. They inculcate the truth that this *fiducia*, this *apprehensio fiducialis*, this *apprehensio voluntatis*, this trusting in the grace of God in Christ, constitutes the essence of faith. (2:426-427)

At least according to Pieper the whole of Lutheranism understands trust to be the essence of faith and understands the promised mercy of God (particularly the promised forgiveness of sins) to be faith's primary object.

This understanding of faith as trust is widely held in other Protestant circles beyond Lutheran ones. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), a classic Reformed confession of faith, defines true faith as "not only a sure knowledge…but also a hearty trust" (*RC* 2:774). The *New Dictionary of Theology*, a popular reference work, explains that "in classical Protestantism, faith is trust in Christ for salvation, the Christ to whom the Scriptures exclusively bear witness" (Helm 326). Similarly, the *ESV Systematic Theology Study Bible* states that "biblical faith is confident trust that brings assurance of salvation to those who know Christ" (1542). The Baptist theologian Wayne Grudem affirms that faith is essentially trust when he writes that "saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God" (862). The Methodist scholar Thomas Oden (d. 2016) expresses a similar understanding, remarking that "saving faith is *personal trust*—trust in a person, Jesus Christ" (597). Statements like these—which define faith as trust—are common in the works of many other Protestant scholars, both past and present. In short, the understanding of faith as trust is ubiquitous in Protestant circles.

Admittedly, among adherents of the faith-as-trust view there is some disagreement concerning the object of faith, namely, whether the object of faith is the promises of God, the person of Christ Himself,

or both. In the main, the first understanding is more common in Lutheran theology, whereas the second understanding or both understandings are more common in Reformed theology and the theological strands influenced by it, such as Baptist theology. We acknowledge that taking Christ Himself as the object of faith represents an improvement over the Lutheran understanding. However, defining the essence of faith as trust is inadequate. We often speak of trusting a person or of trusting in a person's ability to accomplish certain things, yet these typical examples of trusting do not imply that we receive and are united to that person. It is possible, and indeed common, to trust in someone without receiving and being joined to that person. In this light it is evident that one can trust in Christ without necessarily receiving and being united to Him; therefore, trust cannot be the essence of New Testament faith.

Thankfully, certain theologians and biblical scholars over the centuries have picked up on the more intrinsic view of faith revealed in the Scriptures, and we think it is worthwhile to consider some of their more poignant insights concerning faith.

Regrettably, defining faith as trust can open the door to a particularly superstitious and noxious type of "faith." In this understanding, faith becomes a general trust that God can and will ultimately do anything, especially as it relates to personal benefit. Joel Osteen promotes such a view:

> The apostle Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:19 that those who believe would understand the incredible greatness of God's power. Notice the power is activated only when we believe. That means right now the Creator of the universe is just waiting to release healing, restoration, favor, promotion, and abundance. The only catch is that we have to believe.
>
> Sometimes God will put a promise in your heart that seems impossible, a promise that says, "You will be healthy. You will start a business. You will meet the right person and get married." (2-3)
>
> Let this take root in your spirit. Because you are a believer, all will be well with you. All will be well with your family. All will be well with your finances. All will be well in your health. All will be well with your career. You need to get ready because God's promises are about to come to pass in your life. (22)

If Osteen's highly materialistic understanding of faith is accurate, then apparently the faith of the apostle Paul was deficient, since he rarely experienced the outcomes that Osteen claims faith should produce. Moreover, if this view of faith does take root, what becomes of the person whose faith does not result in any of these promises? He or she may be accused of insufficient faith—which, under certain circumstances, can be an exceptionally cruel accusation—or may begin to doubt God Himself. Although we could continue highlighting the many problems of Osteen's view, our greatest concern is his fundamental misunderstanding of what faith really is. We expect that a multitude of theologians would join us in condemning Osteen's superstitious view, which does not match the view of faith revealed in the New Testament. Yet Osteen's idea of faith does resemble, at some level, the predominant view among Protestants that faith is essentially trust. This understanding is deficient, as we have pointed out, because trust does not necessarily involve receiving and being joined to the person in whom we trust. Therefore, trust cannot be the essence of faith as revealed in the New Testament.

The two common views of faith we have evaluated are not caricatures; they are quite popular. Millions of believers hold them in one form or another. Catholics today are still taught that faith is assent to the divine truth, and they are obliged to agree with this teaching if they wish to remain in good standing with the Catholic Church. Despite attempts to qualify or broaden this teaching, assent remains the essence of faith for Catholics. Yet as we have shown, assent without union is not faith. Similarly, millions of Protestants are taught that to believe in Christ is simply to trust in Him. But as we have demonstrated, trust without union is not faith. As we emphasized in the biblical presentation, faith is essentially a matter of receiving Christ, substantiating Christ, and being united to Christ. Those understandings of faith that neglect this intrinsic view fall short of the New Testament revelation.

Witnesses to a More Intrinsic Understanding of Faith

As we have seen, the more common understandings of faith held by Christians—namely, faith as assent and faith as trust—fall short of the biblical understanding, which reveals that faith is essentially an organic matter of receiving, being joined to, and participating in Christ. But, thankfully, certain theologians and biblical scholars over the centuries have picked up on this more intrinsic view of faith revealed in the Scriptures, and we think it is worthwhile to consider some of their more poignant insights concerning faith.

A key insight is that faith involves the believers' inward receiving of Christ; this is expressed in a variety of ways using terms such as *possessing*, *appropriating*, and *receiving*. The Episcopalian theologian William DuBose (d. 1918) observes that "faith is the true subjective apprehension and possession" of an objective reality, namely Christ as the Word of God (224). "Faith," he elaborates, "is not only the assurance or certainty of its object; it is the present possession, the very substance and reality of its object" (225). The Anglican scholar W. H. Griffith Thomas (d. 1924) emphasizes that faith is the way for believers to appropriate the "spiritual possessions in Christ," referenced in verses such as Romans 8:32 and Ephesians 1:3 (40). "Faith," he writes, "accepts all these things in Christ; faith claims them as our own possession; faith appropriates them to our own personal use; faith uses them to the glory of God" (46). A. J. Gordon (d. 1895), a Baptist teacher, uses similar language to capture the essence of faith when he writes that faith is "an appropriation of Jesus Christ" (143). Another Baptist teacher, Augustus Strong (d. 1921), observes that "faith is the act by which we receive Christ" (839), thus highlighting faith's receptive function.

This view of faith as the receiving of Christ is especially pronounced in the writings of two seventeenth-century Reformed theologians, John Flavel (d. 1691) and Petrus van Mastricht (d. 1706). Drawing on John 1:12, Flavel writes that "the very essence of saving faith consists in our receiving of Christ" (*WJF* 2:104). In his spirited defense of this view, he argues—against the Roman Catholics—that assent cannot be the essence of true faith because it is possible for someone to assent without truly receiving Christ; assent, in short, "is found in the unregenerate as well as the regenerate." He also argues—against the Lutherans—that assurance of salvation cannot be the essence of true faith because it is possible for someone to have true faith but to lack assurance; there is, he claims, "many a true believer to whom the joy and comfort of assurance is denied" (*WJF* 2:114). Thus, in his estimation, "*assent widens* the nature of faith too much, and *assurance* upon the other hand *straitens* it too much." But the "fiducial receiving," or acceptance, of Christ is the essence of true faith, Flavel argues, because it "belongs to all true believers, and to none but true believers; and to all true believers at all times" (*WJF* 2:115). A similar emphasis on faith as receiving Christ can be found in the writings of the Dutch theologian Petrus van Mastricht. The "saving act" of faith, he claims, "is called receiving" (2:6). In his insightful elaboration on this saving act, based on a close reading of John 1:12, he grants that saving faith includes acts such as assent and trust while emphasizing that the crucial act in saving faith is the act of receiving:

> But, because several acts coincide in saving faith—knowledge, assent, consent, trust, and so forth—we must observe that one particular act is predominant among them—the act that when present, salvation is present, and when absent, salvation is absent; thus the act that is called saving. What act is it then? The text answers, "Receiving." (2:8)

A key insight is that faith involves the believers' inward receiving of Christ; this is expressed in a variety of ways using terms such as *possessing*, *appropriating*, and *receiving*.

Given the heavy emphasis in Reformed theology on the element of trust in saving faith, it is noteworthy, and perhaps surprising, that Van Mastricht treats receiving Christ rather than trusting in Christ as the "predominant" act in saving faith. On this point, at least, it seems to us that Van Mastricht perceived something remarkable that many others in his theological tradition have missed. More recently, this understanding of faith has been reiterated by the Puritan Reformed scholars Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, who write that "in believing in Christ, the soul receives

Christ," adding that this believing in Christ is "an active appropriation of him" (3:499).

The prominent Lutheran dogmatician Adolf Hoenecke (d. 1908) also affirms that faith is a matter of receiving Christ when he writes that, according to the Scriptures, "faith and receiving Christ are one and the same (Jn. 1:12; 17:8)" (3:361). A similar view is expressed by David Hollaz (d. 1713), another Lutheran dogmatician, who observes that

> in Scripture, receiving Christ through faith is furthermore called putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27), spiritually tasting, eating, and drinking Christ (Psa. 34:9; John 6:50) and κόλλησις, or agglutination with Christ in one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and indeed imports a certain union, like unto that between an apprehending hand and the apprehended treasure, and is called the formal union of faith. (1173)

The intimate connection between believing in(to) Christ and being joined to Him has been noted—and in some cases explored extensively—by prominent theologians throughout history and across the various theological traditions.

This quotation not only presents faith in terms of receiving Christ but also points to another crucial insight concerning faith that deserves our sustained attention: faith joins, or unites, the believers to Christ.

This intimate connection between believing in(to) Christ and being joined to Him has been noted—and in some cases explored extensively—by prominent theologians throughout history and across the various theological traditions. Augustine (d. 430) writes, "The one who believes into Christ, by believing into Christ, Christ comes into him, and in a certain way he is united to Him and is made a member in His Body" (*PL* 38:788). Commenting on the believers' union with Christ in his exposition of Hebrews 11:1, the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas remarks that "this union consists principally in faith and begins with faith" (*LETA* 41:237). Martin Luther offers a strong account of our union with Christ through faith: "For who would fathom from his own resources that faith in Christ unites us with Christ and makes us owners of all the possessions of Christ?" (*LW* 52:18). The Anglican theologian Richard Hooker (d. 1600) remarks that "by faith we are incorporated into" Christ, indicating that the believers' faith unites them with Christ (*FLE* 5:112). Francis Pieper admits that for some Lutheran theologians faith includes "clinging to Christ and joining oneself to Him":

> The Lutheran Confessions and Lutheran theologians declare that faith is an act not only of the intellect, but also of the will. They describe faith in such terms as desiring Christ (*velle*), seeking Christ (*quaerere*), demanding Him (*expetere, desiderare*), as striving and running after Him (*in Christum tendere, in Christum ferri*), as stretching out the hands toward Him and embracing Him (*extendere manus, amplecti, complecti*), as coming to Him, approaching Him, running towards Him (*venire, accedere, currere*), as clinging to Christ and joining oneself to Him (*adhaerere Christo, se adiungere Christo*). (2:433-434)

The Scottish Baptist Alexander Maclaren (d. 1910) perceives a remarkably close connection between the believers' faith and their union with Christ:

> By faith that deep and most real union of the believing soul with Jesus Christ is effected which may be fitly described as our entrance into and abode in Him. The believer is as if incorporated into Him in whom he believes. Indeed, the apostle ventures to use a more startling expression than *incorporation* when he says that "he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." If by faith we press towards, by faith we shall be in Christ. (158)

Another Baptist teacher, the biblical scholar George Eldon Ladd (d. 1982), argues that faith in Christ involves the believers' personal identification, or union, with Christ, not merely their intellectual assent or even trust:

> Faith in (*eis*) Christ means personal identification with him. It is obviously far more than intellectual assent to certain facts, although this is included, or to creedal correctness, although it includes affirmations about Christ. It means the response of the whole person to the revelation that has been given in Christ. It involves much more than trust in Jesus or confidence in him; it is an acceptance of Jesus and of what he claims to be and a dedication of one's life to him. (308)

He adds that faith means "personal union between the believer and Christ" (308), clarifying that, in his view,

"personal identification" and "personal union" are interchangeable expressions. Given the strong evangelical emphasis on faith as trust, it is remarkable that Ladd, himself an evangelical, treats faith as involving more than trust, namely personal identification with Christ.

While it is not uncommon for theologians and biblical scholars—especially those from the Reformed and Lutheran traditions—to affirm that faith joins the believers to Christ, some among them have expressed the intimacy of this relationship between faith and union in ways that we consider both uncommon and exemplary. In his discussion of the various "acts" involved in true faith, the Reformed theologian Francis Turretin (d. 1687) reasons that the "principal" act of faith is

> the act of reception of Christ or of adhesion and union, by which we not only seek Christ through a desire of the soul and fly to him, but apprehend and receive him offered, embrace him found, apply him to ourselves and adhere to and unite ourselves to him. (2:562)

He explains further that this principal act of faith—that of receiving and being joined to Christ—is

> an act of adhesion and binding closely, and of the most strict union by which we are bone of his [Christ's] bone and flesh of his flesh and one with him; and Christ himself dwells in us (Eph. 3:17) and we in him (Jn. 15:5). From this union of persons arises the participation in the blessings of Christ. (2:563)

Like Turretin, the Puritan Congregationalist theologian Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758) observes a remarkably close connection between faith and union in the Scriptures, so much so that he sometimes equates the two in his writings. Faith, he claims, "is the soul's active uniting with Christ, or is itself the very act of unition," that is, of being united, on the part of the believers (*WJE* 19:158). In the same vein, he writes that faith includes

> the whole act of unition to Christ as a Savior: the entire active uniting of the soul, or the whole of what is called "coming to" Christ, and "receiving" of him, is called faith in Scripture. (*WJE* 19:160)

Edwards thus presses further than many of his fellow Reformed theologians by treating faith not simply as the means of being united with Christ but as the union itself, the "whole act of unition." The Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge (d. 1878), who was influenced by Edwards, expresses a view akin to Edwards's when he writes that "to be in Christ" and "to believe in Christ" are "in the Scriptures convertible forms of expression," adding that these expressions "mean substantially the same thing" (3:104). A more recent iteration of this view can be found in the writings of the Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema (d. 1965), who states unambiguously that "faith is our union with Christ" (113).

We should clarify that many of those whom we have quoted above recognize a close similarity between the receptive and unitive aspects of faith, even to the extent that some (like Turretin and Edwards) seem to treat these two aspects as largely interchangeable. In many cases, at least, those who view faith as receiving Christ also see it as being joined to Him, even if they distinguish in some way between receiving and joining. We should also point out that the focus of the quotations referenced so far has been mainly on the believers' initial experience of believing into Christ for their eternal salvation, or what we might call the initial stage of faith. In what follows we shift the focus to faith in its progressing stage, that is, to faith in relation to the continuation of the Christian life rather than its inception.

Jonathan Edwards presses further than many of his fellow Reformed theologians by treating faith not simply as the means of being united with Christ but as the union itself, the "whole act of unition."

In his exposition of Colossians 2:6, which speaks of receiving Christ and walking in Him, the Scottish Presbyterian Ralph Erskine (d. 1752) remarks, "For as we receive Christ Jesus the Lord by faith, so we are to walk in him, namely, by faith…Did you receive him [Christ] by faith? So walk in him by a continual receiving of him" (*SPW* 4:207). Erskine thus recognizes that faith is necessary not only for our receiving of Christ initially but also for our walking in Him continually. A similar recognition is evident in the writings of Herman Bavinck (d. 1921), a Dutch Reformed

theologian, who conceives of faith (believing) as an "appropriating activity"—akin to spiritual eating—that is crucial to the health and development of the spiritual life (267). Bavinck points out that faith appropriates "Christ and all his merits, all the benefits of the covenant of grace," including wisdom, righteousness, and joy (270). "The result of this appropriation by faith of Christ and his merits," Bavinck continues,

> is the growth of the new man. This growth takes place organically, not mechanically. That is, the moral qualities (righteousness, sanctification, peace) are not poured out mechanically into us…but are gradually assimilated by us by faith. Just as food when chewed enters the body and is gradually absorbed into the bloodstream and thus becomes part of our organism, so it is also in the spiritual realm. (271)

As seen in the New Testament and in some of the more insightful writings in the history of Christian thought, to believe is not merely to assent or to trust but to receive, unite with, and substantiate Christ and all the riches in Him.

What strikes us as noteworthy is Bavinck's emphasis on faith as the means for the believers to take in (assimilate) Christ and His "merits" in an ongoing way.

A comparable emphasis on faith's ongoing receptive function throughout the Christian life can be found in the writings of Augustus Strong, whom we quoted earlier. In his discussion of faith as the reception and appropriation of Christ, Strong writes:

> The woman who touched the border of Jesus' garment received his healing power. It is better still to keep in touch with Christ so as to receive continually his grace and life. But best of all is taking him into our inmost being, to be the soul of our soul and the life of our life. This is the essence of faith, though many Christians do not yet realize it. (839)

Here, Strong highlights the enduring significance of faith for the believers, emphasizing that those who have received Christ should "keep in touch" with Him so that they can "receive continually" and take Him into their "inmost being"—all of which reflect faith as an ongoing reception of Christ.

Faith's ongoing importance in the Christian life is likewise emphasized by the Anglican theologian and biblical exegete Richard Sibbes (d. 1635). In a sermon on the life of faith, based on Galatians 2:20, Sibbes compares faith to a conduit that carries the spiritual life given by the Son of God—the "spring of this life"—to the believers. "Faith," he writes, "is that vessel which conveys this spiritual life, that conduit wherein all spiritual graces run, for the framing and working of spiritual life" (*CWRS* 5:359-360). Thus, Sibbes stresses that faith is the means by which the believers receive the spiritual supply needed to live a life of faith.

In closing, we should note that many of the finer considerations of faith highlighted in this section are part of a broader realization that we can gladly affirm: faith is vital because it joins the believers to Christ Himself, the source of salvation, thus enabling them to receive and participate in what He is and has accomplished for their salvation. Richard Sibbes expresses this well when he writes that "whatsoever Christ hath, or is, or hath done or suffered, it is mine by reason of this union with him by faith, which is the grace of union that knits us to Christ" (*CWRS* 5:242). Petrus van Mastricht expresses a similar conviction when he observes that true faith—the reception of Christ Himself—has two main ends, or fruits: "union with Christ and communion in his goods." Concerning this union and communion with Christ, he writes:

> First, we receive Christ so that we may have him (Ps. 73:25-26), or so that we may be united with him, that he may be in us (Eph. 3:17) and we in him (Eph. 1:13)…
>
> Second, we receive Christ so that in and with him we may obtain every kind of saving goods (Rom. 8:32), so that from his fullness we may receive grace upon grace (John 1:12; cf. v. 16), to such a degree that we may be perfect in him (Col. 2:9-10). (2:12)

This commendable understanding concerning the believers' union and communion with Christ—realized by true faith—has been expressed by many other theologians over the centuries. However, we can only gesture toward this important understanding here, as the focus of this article is on faith itself, not its results. We hope that the selection of quotations presented above will deepen our understanding and appreciation of faith as revealed in the New Testament.

Conclusion

As seen in the New Testament and in some of the more insightful writings in the history of Christian thought, to believe is not merely to assent or to trust but to receive, unite with, and substantiate Christ and all the riches in Him. Faith is crucial not merely for our entry into the Christian life but also for our ongoing experience of everything in God's economy. The following articles in this issue explore many aspects of faith in light of the view that we have presented here. We hope these articles will encourage a renewed consideration of faith, which is surely one of the precious "words of this life" (Acts 5:20).

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Distinctively Modern Understandings of Faith

We would be remiss if we did not say at least something about the plethora of novel accounts of faith that have appeared in the past few centuries. Many of them are further degradations of the assent view. While classical accounts of faith as assent have generally insisted that faith is a supernatural assent, many modern proposals consider faith as merely human assent and search for the adequate warrant for such belief. Various warrants have been proposed, including miracles (John Locke), reason (Isaac Barrow), and collective testimony (George Hooper) (Shagan 207-249). Such assent, of course, is entirely possible apart from union with Christ, and so it—even more so than the supernatural assent of Catholic theology—cannot be the faith of which the New Testament speaks. Indeed, even the Catholic Church itself condemned several unabashedly rationalistic accounts of faith (*DH* §3041).

Alongside these rationalistic accounts of faith, a variety of highly speculative accounts of faith have appeared in the modern period. Many of these accounts propose a faith with no explicit reference to Christ and owe more to various modern philosophical trends than to the revelation of the New Testament. According to Paul Tillich (d. 1965), "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned" (1). Karl Rahner (d. 1984) espouses the view that someone with no knowledge of the gospel, or of Christ, or even of God—indeed, even an avowed atheist—can be said to have "anonymous faith" so long as he "accepts himself in a moral decision" and thus "assumes…his own radical transcendence" (16:58-59). According to John Macquarrie (d. 2007) religious faith arises "out of an existential attitude, a self-understanding that is born in acceptance and commitment" and "looks to the wider being within which our existence is set for support" (80). In all these accounts faith's basic object is not doctrinal content but some transcendent horizon beyond the human being, whether that be ultimate meaning, moral obligation, or being itself. But, again, one can be confronted with all these matters without confronting the person

of Christ, the clear and unambiguous object of faith in the New Testament. These too, therefore, cannot be the essence of faith.

One final distinctively modern development that deserves more thorough consideration (indeed, more than we can give it here) is the rise of the so-called New Perspective on Paul (NPP) with its various accounts of faith. This family of accounts, we feel, is worthy of more extended evaluation for two main reasons. First, NPP views are increasingly making inroads into biblical scholarship and will likely make their way into seminary instruction, and via that instruction, into the preaching of many congregations. They are thus much more likely to be encountered by the typical believer than any of the heady accounts of faith offered by writers like Tillich and Hooper. N. T. Wright, the most prominent and influential representative of NPP, proposes an account of faith that is little more than "loyalty to Jesus as Messiah," which is "the badge that functions, within the Pauline worldview, as the sign of membership in God's people" (*Paul* 1:405-406). Faith, according to Wright's consistent formula, does not secure individual salvation; it merely demonstrates that one is already a member of God's covenant people. The Greek word for faith, Wright contends, is best understood in terms of covenant faithfulness. The fact that such covenant faithfulness is the badge of God's New Testament people, he argues, makes perfect sense because "*pistis*, faithfulness, (a) always was supposed to be the badge of Israel, (b) now has been the badge of Jesus, and so (c) is the appropriate badge—the only badge!—by which Jesus' followers are to be marked out" (2:839-840). Wright is, in fact, so committed to this view that in his translation of the New Testament (*The Kingdom New Testament*) he translates Romans 4:9 ("Faith was accounted to Abraham as righteousness") as follows: "His faith was calculated to Abraham *as indicating that he was in the right*" (emphasis added). What most English translations render "as righteousness" or "for righteousness" Wright renders "as indicating that he was in the right," clearly inserting into the text his own understanding that faith is a mere badge.

The faith revealed in the New Testament is a causal principle of partaking in and substantiating all the riches of God's salvation embodied in Christ. To reduce it to a mere evidentiary badge demonstrating membership among God's covenant people is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. Wright, of course, says many other things about faith, some of them more in line with what the Christian church has long taught, but he is still capable of speaking of faith in these purely extrinsic terms, and he often does so. While Wright's views will likely continue to spread for many years to come, the believers do well to guard themselves against the view of faith presented by Wright and his followers and to fight the good fight of the faith against such dangerous deviations (for a more thorough evaluation of Wright's view of faith, see Campbell et al. 278-295).

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"THE MYSTERY *of the* FAITH"

Roger Good • Chao-Chun Liu • The editors

The apostle Paul, in giving guidance to his younger co-worker Timothy for the administration of a local church, says that the deacons should be ones "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9). The faith here is the objective faith, the things that we believe in. These are the contents of God's New Testament economy, which is centered on Christ's person and work for the accomplishment of the good pleasure of God's will, including our salvation. While to us the faith may seem objective and simple, to Paul the faith was a "mystery," and this characterization should give us pause. We should not expect that Paul is applying the meaning of the modern English word *mystery* to the faith that is common to all believers. Our English word *mystery* is, in fact, the transliteration of the Greek word that he uses (μυστήριον, *mystērion*), and his word has its own particular meanings, all of which do not match that of our English word. Thus, in reading *the mystery of the faith*, we should be careful not to deflate what he is saying to what easily comes to the mind of an English speaker. He is not saying that the faith is "mysterious," that is, difficult to understand or shrouded in secrecy or beyond complete perception. He is saying that the faith is a μυστήριον, in his sense of the term, and this characterization opens up to us something fundamental about the objective faith, which has been delivered to us once for all and is common to us all (Jude 3; Titus 1:4).

The Greek word μυστήριον (*mystērion*) has a long and storied history in the Ancient Greek language, and careful study of the word indicates that, like most words in most languages, it developed in meaning over time (*TDNT* 4:802-824). Thus, in trying to understand what Paul means by the term, we must be careful not to anachronistically apply meanings that probably do not obtain in his writings. Paul's use of μυστήριον needs to be isolated not just from modern language derivatives but also from archaic Greek predecessors. Because Paul was thoroughly versed in the Old Testament writings, it is perhaps enlightening to note that in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament μυστήριον is linked to revelation and picks up the connotation of something that is to be or has been revealed. This is particularly clear in Daniel: "the mystery was revealed to Daniel" (Dan. 2:19); "there is a God in the heavens who reveals mysteries" (Dan. 2:28); "He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will happen" (Dan. 2:29); "this mystery has not been revealed to me because of some wisdom that is in me" (Dan. 2:30); "your [Daniel's] God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a Revealer of mysteries" (Dan. 2:47). Paul, no doubt, understood that a μυστήριον in the biblical sense is not simply something held in secret (as in the Greek mystery religions) but something formerly held in secret but now revealed by God. He adopts this connotation in his own use of the term in Ephesians: "By revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit" (Eph. 3:3-5). "The mystery," for Paul, was not something mysterious or secret; it was something that was formerly hidden but

While to us the faith may seem objective and simple, to Paul the faith was a "mystery," and this characterization should give us pause.

now revealed. The mystery hid from ages and now revealed is this (as Paul goes on to say): "That in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). This was indeed hidden in Old Testament times. While there are intimations in the Old Testament that the nations would eventually enjoy God's salvation (e.g., Gen. 9:27; Isa. 19:23-25; 49:6; 60:1-3; Ezek. 47:22), it is difficult to find there the Body of Christ with both Jews and Gentiles as fellow members. It is also difficult to find there Christ's incorporation of His believers into Himself ("in Christ Jesus"). And it is difficult to understand that this is the essence of the Old Testament promise that was to be corporately partaken of through the New Testament gospel. In its bare essence, this mystery is simply Christ with the church as His Body, not simply the Messiah, nor simply salvation from perdition, nor even eternal blessedness, all of which are clearly revealed in the Old Testament. What was formerly hidden and had to be revealed is Christ and the church, and this is why it was a μυστήριον, in Paul's sense of the term.

> The faith is far from a mere set of beliefs simply taught and assented to or merely recited by rote. The faith, that is, the mystery of the faith, is something that must be revealed to each and every one of us by God through His word.

This meaning of μυστήριον ('mystery'), which developed over time into the biblical meaning, is evident in all of Paul's uses of the term. While we cannot examine all twenty-one instances in Paul's writings, we believe that this meaning will be evident to those who wish to examine them, since generally there is within their contexts some indication of revelation or manifestation or understanding or speaking forth of the mystery: what was previously held in secret has now been revealed. But we can and should examine one particular instance, which Paul calls a great mystery: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32). Paul is, of course, alluding to the account of the bringing together of Adam and his counterpart Eve in Genesis 2:21-24, and in the last verse of that account he perceives the great mystery of Christ and the church. Again, the meaning is that what was previously held in secret in the counsel of God (cf. Acts 20:27) related to the bringing together of Adam and Eve has now been revealed through His holy apostles and prophets, and again, the bare essence of this mystery, the great mystery, is Christ and the church.

Also, in most of Paul's uses of μυστήριον ('mystery') in his writings he seems to be speaking of a single mystery that has been revealed, in line with what he says in Colossians 1:25-26: "I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints." Here he speaks of the word of God as one mystery that has been hidden but now has been revealed to the believers. He does describe this one mystery in various ways elsewhere, no doubt to show details and aspects of it—"the mystery of His will" (Eph. 1:9), "the mystery of God" (1 Cor. 2:1), "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4; Col. 4:3), "the mystery of God, Christ" (Col. 2:2), "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19), "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16)—and in relation to the apostles' stewardship and ministry, he speaks of "the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). These variations in utterance are not trivial or insignificant; they all attest to the multifariousness of the one mystery that was revealed to Paul. We cannot delve into all these facets of the one mystery, but the point here is that in all its multifariousness the mystery is one.

We have said this much about mystery in Paul's writings to make clear that what Paul meant by μυστήριον ('mystery') in all his other writings should also apply to his use of the term in *the mystery of the faith* in 1 Timothy 3:9. The mystery of the faith is the same one mystery, which was revealed to the apostles and prophets in spirit, which encompasses the mystery of God, of Christ, and of Christ and the church, and which is the hidden essence of the promise in the Old Testament and the open contents of the full gospel in the New. Thus, the phrase *the mystery of the faith* summarily encompasses all the other aspects of the same one mystery just as, upon further reflection, we find

that every other descriptor of the one mystery summarily encompasses them as well: *the mystery of His will*, *the mystery of God*, *the mystery of Christ*, *the mystery of the gospel*, etc. The faith then *is* the mystery that Paul mentions throughout his writings. The faith, in that it is the one mystery, is something that, though once hidden, now comes by revelation alone, and this is the striking aspect of the faith that has been passed over by many over the centuries. The faith is far from a mere set of beliefs simply taught and assented to or merely recited by rote. The faith, that is, the mystery of the faith, is something that must be revealed to each and every one of us by God through His word.

In reading his Epistles, we can certainly perceive Paul's understanding in the mystery of the faith, and we can expect that his understanding increased and deepened during his Christian and church life and his ministry to the Gentiles. But even at the very moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus, he received the complete revelation of the mystery of the faith, if only seminally. In the three accounts of his conversion experience in Acts (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-18), this point is clear. What was revealed to Paul was the resurrected and ascended Christ as both the Head and the Body: "I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And I said, Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (Acts 26:14-15). Paul may have thought that he was righteously rounding up troublemakers among the Jews. But through Jesus' appearing, it was revealed to him that these pestilent people were Jesus Himself, and to persecute them was to persecute Him. The revelation was blinding, and we expect that after seeing this, Paul could not see anything inwardly for some time. Jesus, now revealed to Paul surely as the long-awaited Messiah, surely as the promised Redeemer, surely as Lord of all, was revealed to him even more significantly as the corporate "Me," the Head and the Body, the church. This revelation concerning who Christ is in His full expression in the church certainly motivated and occupied Paul for the rest of his life, and to him it became the faith that he preached (Gal. 1:23) and gave service to throughout his ministry (Phil. 2:17). Paul's encounter with and the revelation of this "Me" as the corporate God-man, the one new man produced through Christ's death and resurrection (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10-11; Rom. 1:4; 8:29), became the source and content of his faith. His Epistles in the New Testament can be considered the detailed development of this heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). Thus, the faith, the objective faith, did not come to Paul by way of man's teaching or as a set of doctrines but by revelation (Gal. 1:11-17), by the heavenly vision of this corporate God-man comprising Christ as the Head and the church as the Body. The faith, as what was previously hidden from him but had been revealed to him at his conversion, was in the truest sense "the mystery of the faith."

It is likewise the case with the apostle Peter that he received the complete revelation of the mystery of the faith (again if only seminally) very early in his life and that this revelation became the source and content of his ministry of the faith. Peter did not come to know Christ and have faith in Him by learning a set of doctrines about Him. Rather, as Matthew 16 records, he received the revelation that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) not from man but from God the Father directly, as Jesus Himself testified to him: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:17; cf. Matt. 11:27). But this was not the full content of the revelation that he received that day. Immediately after Peter received such a revelation, the Lord continued to say: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Leaving aside the tempting but stale dispute concerning who Peter and his successors are in the church, we should focus on the fact that the Lord Jesus also revealed something ("And I also say to you"): the revelation of the church was also part of what Peter received by revelation that day. Witness Lee notes:

> The Father's revelation concerning Christ is only the first half of the great mystery, which is Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Hence, the Lord needed to reveal to Peter the second half also, which concerns the church. (Matt. 16:18, note 1)

To Peter it was revealed who Christ is, and to Peter it was also revealed that the Christ revealed to him would

Even at the very moment of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, he received the complete revelation of the mystery of the faith, if only seminally.

do one paramount thing—build His church. The revelation that Peter received from God in Christ that day was simply Christ and the church, the same one great mystery of the faith that the apostle Paul would later receive by revelation, and this revelation would motivate and occupy Peter throughout the years of his ministry, as it would Paul. Having received the revelation of Christ and the church in Matthew 16, Peter preached this revelation as his gospel in Acts 4, where he announced Jesus Christ to the Jewish people as "the stone which was considered as nothing by you, the builders, which has become the head of the corner," and that "there is salvation in no other, for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). Here Peter, using the Lord's words in Matthew 21:42 (itself a quotation from Psalm 118:22), declares that Christ is not just the Savior with the highest name but also the precious stone for God's building. The content of Peter's gospel in Acts 4 cannot be confined to just Christ as the Savior. The content of the faith preached in Acts 4 also includes Christ as the Head of the church as His building work. Then, much later in his ministry, Peter brings the readers of his first Epistle to the same point: Christ as the living stone whom the builders rejected has now been revealed to be the head of the corner of a spiritual house, that is, the church (1 Pet. 2:4-7). By preaching Christ as the "Stone-Savior" for God's building, Peter showed that Christ is not only the Savior to save sinners from sins and eternal perdition but, much more positively and importantly, the living and uniting stone for His building work in the church. Witness Lee's footnote on Acts 4:11 is quite enlightening:

> Peter's quoting of this word indicates that he preached Christ not only as the Savior for the sinners' salvation but also as the stone for God's building. It is such a Christ who is the unique salvation to sinners, and it is in His unique name under heaven, a name despised and rejected by the Jewish leaders but honored and exalted by God (Phil. 2:9-10), that sinners must be saved (v. 12) not only from sin (Matt. 1:21) but also to participate in God's building (1 Pet. 2:5). (Acts 4:11, note 1)

> It is likewise the case with the apostle Peter that he received the complete revelation of the mystery of the faith very early in his life and that this revelation became the source and content of his ministry of the faith.

Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter as the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:8) received the mystery of the faith by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus at the beginning of their walk with the Lord, and the revelation that they both received was not simply of the individual Christ as Redeemer and Savior but more fully of the corporate Christ as the Head of the church, which is His Body, and as the uniting living stone in the church, which is His spiritual house. This full revelation of Christ, that is, the revelation of Christ and the church, may strike some Christians today as new and unheard of. But it is what is in the New Testament, and if it has escaped any believer's notice, then our point is made: Christ and the church is something that has previously been hidden (in plain view perhaps) but has now been revealed through the holy apostles. Christ and the church is the mystery of the faith.

"The Common Faith"

We have been speaking of the mystery of the faith, that is, the objective faith, in its "bare essence" and "only seminally," and in these senses, the objective faith is simply Christ and the church. But Christ and the church as the essence of the faith certainly has greater riches to it. When we speak of Christ as part of the faith, we are primarily referring to His person, and when we speak of the church as part of the faith, we are primarily referring to His work, and this expands our understanding of the faith to that of the person and work of Christ. Concerning His person, the revelation of the Bible is that Christ is the incarnated Son of God, and this entails the further biblical revelation that God is not just the Father but also the Son (and, as we will see below, the Spirit). Thus, the revelation of who Christ is unfolds to us who God is: He is the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—and this is the defining characteristic of the Christian faith. The Triune God is at best intimated in the Old Testament, but God is not clearly revealed in His Trinity until the Son comes in incarnation in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-5), and this revelation of God is central to the mystery of the faith. Of course, the fact that Christ unfolds the reality of the Triune God is fully in line

with who He is as the Son of God and as the Word of God in that as the Son He manifests that God is the Father and as the Word He defines, explains, and expresses what God is in His every aspect. The fullness of God dwells in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9), and He is the expression of God the great, and the mystery of the faith encompasses and reveals this reality.

But the mystery of the faith also reveals that Christ is also a human being, like us in every sense yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Certainly the incarnation was a great secret that was hidden from the generations and even now requires revelation from God in order to be believed. The revelation of this aspect of His person is that He was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14) and that

The mystery of the faith includes the Spirit in the all-important aspect of making Christ and His work real within and through His believers. This revelation concerning the Spirit far surpasses the almost negligible attention given to the Spirit across the ages.

He lived a human life that was perfectly according to the will of God, even to the point of being obedient to the death of the cross as God's will for Him (Phil. 2:8; Matt. 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42). He was in every sense the perfect human being who alone, in His person, could be the true Lamb of God as the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin (John 1:29). The visible Old Testament sacrifices, which covered and passed over all sins and trespasses and brought in peace before God, secretly hid His deeper intention to reveal His Son, come in the flesh in time, as the final and complete sacrifice for sin (Rom. 3:25-26). Thus, the mystery of the faith encompasses Christ's dying a redemptive death for us, which is both a revelation of His person, revealing who He is as the perfect sacrifice, and of His work, revealing what He did by His death (e.g., Matt. 20:28; Heb. 10:12; Rom. 8:3; 6:6; John 12:31; Heb. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; Eph. 2:14-15; John 12:24). The faith also reveals that Christ rose from the dead on the third day after His death (1 Cor. 15:1-4) and that He ascended to the right hand of God to have all authority as Lord of all (Matt. 26:64; 28:18; Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rev. 1:5; 19:16) and as Head over all things to the church, which is His Body (Eph. 1:20-23). At the end of this age Christ will come back in glory to reign as King in His kingdom over all the earth (Luke 21:27; Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7; 20:4, 6; 11:15), and every knee will bow and every tongue will openly confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). "This is the great end of all that Christ is and has done in His person and work (1 Cor. 15:24-28)" (Lee, Phil. 2:11, note 3), and therefore, the glory of God the Father is the great goal of the mystery of our faith.

All that Christ is in His person would be of limited practical value to us His believers if the third of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit, did not come to us and guide us into all the reality of who Christ is. The Lord Jesus clearly reveals this aspect of the Spirit in His last extended speaking to the disciples:

> But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you. (John 16:13-15)

As Christ the Son is in relation to the Father, manifesting and expressing Him, so is the Spirit in relation to the Son, declaring and glorifying Him. While the Spirit was clearly evident in Old Testament times, His relationship and function related to the Son was held in secret until the resurrection of Christ. But it was alluded to before the resurrection, and it is in this sense that John says that "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39), for in resurrection Jesus was glorified not only in Himself but also in and as the Spirit of reality. Thus, the mystery of the faith includes the Spirit in this all-important aspect of making Christ and His work real within and through His believers. This revelation concerning the Spirit far surpasses the almost negligible attention given to the Spirit across the ages, whereby the Spirit is certainly acknowledged but just as certainly not fully understood and not fully experienced in His person and work.

While all genuine Christians hold Christ's work of redemption as central to the faith, many do not have the same view concerning His work related to the church. Many feel that the church is an optional matter and not likewise central to the faith. But Christ's work did not stop when He died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty

on high. His work continues in His heavenly ministry: "We have such a High Priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Heb. 8:1-2). When He proclaimed on the cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), what He finished was "the work of His all-inclusive death, by which He accomplished redemption [Gal. 3:13; Titus 2:14], terminated the old creation [Rom. 6:6; Heb. 2:9], and released His resurrection life [John 12:24; 7:39; cf. 19:34] to bring forth the new creation [Eph. 2:15; Gal. 6:14-15] to fulfill God's purpose" (Lee, John 19:30, note 2). While these accomplishments are truly monumental, they are not the end of the work of Christ that we must hold as part of our faith. The full work of Christ does not end until the word that is written comes to pass: "And He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 21:5-6). Our faith holds the full work of Christ as its content, not just the redemptive aspect, and Christ Himself reveals His full work, if only seminally, in the revelation that He gave to Peter: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The building up of the church as His Body has been going on throughout the ages since His death, resurrection, and ascension, but ultimately it will be consummated in the New Jerusalem, that built-up mutual dwelling of the redeeming God with all His redeemed, transformed, and glorified chosen ones from both the Old Testament age and the New. That eternal mutual dwelling of God and man will have its "gates" as a testimony for eternity that God's building prevails over the gates of Satan's authority and power of darkness. Thus, the full work of Christ, which we must hold as part of the revelation of the mystery of the faith, encompasses the building up of His church until its final consummation in the New Jerusalem. The church, then, is also our hope, our conviction, our faith.

All that we hold as the full contents of the mystery of the faith is sourced and revealed in the Bible as the Word of God. We firmly believe Paul's declaration concerning the Scriptures: "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is certainly profitable for many, many things, even things that do not have anything to do with the mystery of the faith (e.g., morality, ethics, history, literature), and many come to the Bible for reasons other than establishing the faith. But the primary function of the Bible is to reveal Christ in His marvelous person and work, as He Himself says: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me" (John 5:39). And later the Lord Jesus on the very day of His resurrection opened the Scriptures to some of His disciples in its function to reveal Him: "Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them clearly in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:13, 32, 27). While the mystery of the faith is the full riches of Christ and the church, it is the Bible that opens up that revelation of the faith to us. But in a deeper sense, the Bible is not simply the source of the revelation of the faith. In our view

> Regardless of the facts of history and our own predilections, we must hold fast to the conviction that Christ will build His church and present her to Himself glorious and without blemish. This, too, is our faith, and in fact, this is the great mystery of our faith.

God in Christ as the Spirit moves not just *according to* the Bible as the Word of God but also *by means of* His very word in the Bible so that He may build up the Body of Christ (John 17:17; Eph. 5:26) for the accomplishment of what is revealed in the mystery of the faith.

The New Testament believers should hold Christ with His church as the full contents of "the common faith" "once for all delivered to the saints" (Titus 1:4; Jude 3). This is what the apostles teach in full in the New Testament. Of course, we realize that many Christians today ignore or discount the church as something of the faith, and we lament. But it is difficult to ignore Christ's word "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18) and to discount Paul's declaration that "the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church" (Eph. 3:10). Certainly, the church across the

ages has had failures, and to this day she still falls short of her full calling and has imperfections. Because of this, many Christians either have lost hope in the church or have decided on their own that the church is only a human institution and not really something of God at all. But according to the apostles' teaching in the New Testament, God's intention in the fullness of His economy is that Christ will "sanctify [the church], cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27). The church is Christ's own Body, and He nourishes and cherishes her as His own Body (Eph. 5:29). In fact, even when He died on the cross, Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up *for her*" (Eph. 5:25; cf. 5:2), not just for the redemption of us as individual believers. Regardless of the facts of history and our own predilections, we must believe what has been delivered to us as the faith, and we must hold fast to the conviction that Christ will build His church and present her to Himself glorious and without blemish. This, too, is our faith, and in fact, this is the great mystery of our faith, which requires first His revelation and then our obedience to this heavenly vision (Acts 26:19).

"The Economy of the Mystery"

When we consider the contents of the mystery of the faith as a whole, we notice that in its complete character it is not a set of doctrines for belief or, worse, points to memorize and recite by rote. Rather, it turns out to be the whole narrative of God's work in the New Testament age: God in Christ becomes a man, lives a perfect human life, dies for the sins of the whole world, rises from the dead, ascends to the throne as Lord, descends as the life-giving Spirit, creates the church as one new man, builds up the church as His Body, returns again and reigns as King of kings, and ultimately consummates His whole New Testament endeavor in the New Jerusalem for His eternal glory. Amen and Hallelujah! The faith then is not something that we simply believe in. At its most intrinsic level, the faith is what God Himself is doing in the New Testament age to fully carry out the good pleasure of His will. It is, we can say mundanely, His plan, or we can quote Paul, who describes it with greater clarity and as an apostle:

> To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what *the economy of the mystery* is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:8-11, emphasis added)

The mystery hidden in God throughout the ages has an arrangement to it, what the ancient Greeks with Paul call an οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) and what we should call an economy in order to capture some degree of Paul's richer expression. It is not, of course, an economy in the sense of a system of monetary and material resources but an economy in its biblical (and eventually theological) sense of the arrangement of God's activity in time for the accomplishment of His will. The economy of this mystery is the full contents of the faith, and Paul was given grace to enlighten all (including us today) to see this economy. Paul announced Christ in the unsearchable riches of His person and work as good news, and this was itself part of the revelation of the mystery of the faith. (If the gospel was not good news, why was it something that needed to be announced?) But his ministry was also to enlighten (not merely teach) all to see the full arrangement of God's activity to make manifest His multifaceted wisdom, and "the economy of the mystery" takes the church as its basis, process, and means to carry out that intention. The economy of this mystery unfolds in time according to the purpose that God established in Christ Jesus our Lord from eternity past.

When we consider the contents of the mystery of the faith as a whole, we notice that in its complete character it is not a set of doctrines for belief or, worse, points to memorize and recite by rote. Rather, it turns out to be the whole narrative of God's work in the New Testament age.

From this highest perspective, we see that the faith is far more than a set of beliefs or a creed to be recited.

It may certainly be only this much to many Christians, but it may be that many Christians have not yet been enlightened to see the full economy of the mystery of the faith, a situation that can be easily remedied by asking in prayer (Matt. 7:7-8; John 16:24; cf. James 4:2). Paul was certainly praying for this in regard to the faith of the believers under his care (Eph. 1:15-23). When we see the economy of the mystery of the faith, we discover that it is not merely a set of almost unrelated tenets about God, Christ, the virgin birth, redemption, Christ's resurrection, ascension, and return, the Holy Spirit, the church, and our resurrection and eternity with God. Instead, it is the very action, through time, of God in Christ as the Spirit with us as His Body to accomplish His eternal purpose. The faith is not a map or a set of signposts along the way; it is the journey itself. We, His New Testament believers, are on this journey, and in fact, we are part of His journey through time. We have not yet reached the full end, but we are well on the way toward the accomplishment of His economy of the mystery of the faith. Praise Him!

"God's Economy, Which Is in Faith"

All that has been said above relates to faith in its objective aspect, and in this aspect the faith is the contents of God's economy to accomplish the good pleasure of His will. As such, it is truly objective to us in that it involves the Triune God in His actions to carry out His eternal purpose. In a sense, then, the objective faith is external to us and could hypothetically be carried out without us. But the fact remains that God's economy is the contents of what the New Testament calls the faith, and therefore, our believing is in some sense necessary. We cannot, in other words, reduce the faith to something coequal with God's economy without any reference to the faith of the believers. Indeed, the faith is God's economy as apprehended by faith. The objective faith is something that requires our subjective faith, that is, our believing ability, which has been instilled into us by God in Christ as the Spirit. Even if, to our impression, our subjective faith is small—and we can often feel that way—it nevertheless believes to some small degree in God and His wonderful doings. Deep in the heart of every true Christian, of every true believer, is a longing to believe in God, Christ, and the Spirit, even if often there seem to be layers and layers of doubt and suspicion and even distrust. This believing ability is innate to the life that we received in regeneration and never fully goes away.

> The subjective faith makes God and His wonderful economy real within us and indeed makes us part of His wonderful economy.

But beyond this, the wonderful fact is that the subjective faith also substantiates God in Christ as the Spirit within us so that He may carry out His economy through us (if we will allow Him to). As we say repeatedly in the other articles of this issue of *A&C*, the subjective faith does not merely believe the objective faith that is outside of us; more importantly, it receives what it believes and substantiates what it believes within us. In other words, the subjective faith makes God and His wonderful economy real within us and indeed makes us part of His wonderful economy. The apostle Paul speaks of "God's economy, which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4), and this helps us to understand that what God does in His economy He does according to the objective faith and by means of our subjective faith. Witness Lee, who pays much attention to the economy of God in his writings, offers this note on Paul's characterization of God's economy:

> The economy of God is a matter in faith, i.e., a matter that is initiated and developed in the sphere and element of the faith. God's economy, which is to dispense Himself into His chosen people, is not in the natural realm nor in the work of law but in the spiritual sphere of the new creation through regeneration by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:23-26). By faith we are born of God to be His sons, partaking of His life and nature to express Him. By faith we are put into Christ to become the members of His Body, sharing all that He is for His expression. This is God's plan (dispensation), which is carried out in faith, according to His New Testament economy. (1 Tim. 1:4, note 4).

The faith, in its objective sense, is the sphere in which God carries out His economy in the New Testament age. In the Old Testament age, He created human beings and eventually gave His chosen people Israel the law, but He does not intend to fulfill His eternal plan in the natural realm of His creation or through the law that He gave. Rather, His intention is to come in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen ones and to regenerate them with His life and make them a new creation for the carrying out of the good pleasure of His will. This intention is the contents of the objective faith, and it is completely in a spiritual realm, that

is, a realm that is fully in and through Him as the Spirit. But everything in this spiritual realm requires substantiation by our subjective faith. By our subjective faith we do not simply believe that we are the children of God; by faith we are actually and genuinely regenerated with God's life and nature and are begotten of Him as His children. Further, by our subjective faith we do not simply believe in Christ; by faith we actually believe *into* Christ to become the very members of His mystical Body. The objective faith is the contents and sphere of God's economy, and our subjective faith provides the actualization of His economy in and through us as His believers. God's economy can be purely objective to us, if we are content to let it be so. But if we wish to be part of His economy, we have our God-given faith as the means to make His economy our reality, our living, and even our expression. Faith, then, in its fullest form is like two ends of the same stick: the objective faith as the economy of God and subjective faith as the actualization and fulfilling of that economy in us, His believers. The whole economy of God, as the plan conceived by God objectively and as the plan carried out by God in His believers subjectively, is "in faith."

"Until We All Arrive at the Oneness of the Faith"

In Ephesians 4:13 the apostle Paul reveals a particular facet of the faith—"the oneness of the faith"—that might easily be taken for granted but that is, in fact, brimming with insight and crucial to our full apprehension of the faith. After speaking of the perfecting of the saints "unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), Paul points to the issue and goal of this perfecting:

> Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

The apostle's utterance here should give us pause. We might think that as believers we already have "the oneness of the faith" that Paul speaks of. The faith, after all, has been delivered to the saints "once for all" (Jude 3), and it might seem to us that the oneness of the faith is simply a matter of assenting to this common faith together with our fellow believers. But Paul seems to have a different understanding. The simple fact that he speaks of *arriving at* the oneness of the faith suggests that this oneness is not something that we already possess. It is a destination, something arrived at through a process. We should bear in mind that Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is addressed to believers ("the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus" [Eph. 1:1]), who had already believed into Christ and who were already meeting as the church in Ephesus. That Paul exhorts these saints to arrive at the oneness of the faith—as something attainable but not yet realized—suggests that this oneness is not something possessed simply by virtue of believing into Christ or even by virtue of meeting as a local church. In this sense, at least, "the oneness of the faith" is distinct from "the oneness of the Spirit," of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:3. The oneness of the Spirit is something that we as believers already possess and should be "diligent to keep" (Eph. 4:3), whereas the oneness of the faith is something that we need to arrive at, to attain to, through a journey.

The simple fact that Paul speaks of *arriving at* the oneness of the faith suggests that this oneness is not something that we already possess. It is a destination, something arrived at through a process.

What is "the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God" at which we should arrive? The apostle does not leave us in the dark concerning the meaning of this crucial expression. In Ephesians 4:13 he indicates that this oneness, though singular, is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. In an insightful note on this verse, Witness Lee explains that

> *the faith* does not refer to the act of our believing but to the things in which we believe, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work accomplished for our salvation. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the apprehension of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. (Eph. 4:13, note 2)

That the oneness revealed in Ephesians 4:13 is *of the faith* suggests that it is produced by the faith, the great mystery that we considered at length in the preceding sections. As we apprehend this mystery and cleave to it, we are brought into the genuine and practical oneness with our fellow believers that Paul calls

"the oneness of the faith." This oneness is not an organized display of unity but the spontaneous and genuine outworking of the faith that we see and hold. Further, that this same oneness is *of the full knowledge of the Son of God* suggests that it is produced by our subjective, experiential knowledge of Christ the Son, who in His person and work is the very object of our faith. As we hold the faith and grow in our experiential knowledge of faith's object, we will advance in our journey toward the practical oneness in Ephesians 4:13. This speaks to the profound effect that the faith can have on those who truly see and hold it.

Paul sheds further light on what the oneness of the faith is by setting "at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God" in apposition to both "at a full-grown man" and "at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This appositional structure, signaled by three parallel uses of the word *at*, suggests that the oneness of the faith *is* a full-grown man, which *is* the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. To arrive at the oneness of the faith, then, is to arrive at a full-grown man, which is to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The full-grown man here is the church as the new man, which, as Paul tells us elsewhere in Ephesians, was created in Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:15-16) and which the believers have been taught to "put on" (Eph. 4:24). This full-grown man is also the church as the Body of Christ, which is the fullness, the expression, of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). If we find it odd that Paul equates the oneness of the faith with the church as the new man and the Body of Christ, this could indicate that we have yet to see what the apostle saw concerning the genuine oneness, the faith, and the church. Paul's deep realization in Ephesians 4:13 is that the oneness of the faith is in fact the church, revealed in such rich detail throughout his Epistle to the Ephesians. The church is where the genuine oneness—that oneness for which Jesus prayed in John 17—is located, practiced, and fulfilled. It is in and through the church that the oneness becomes practical. Paul's word in Ephesians 4:13 thus gives us the light and the boldness to say that to arrive at the oneness of the faith is to arrive at the oneness of the church, specifically the church as the new man ("a full-grown man") and as the Body of Christ ("the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"). The oneness of the faith, then, is not a notion or ideal. It is the church as a full-grown man. If we aspire to arrive at the oneness of the faith, as many of us surely do, we should care for the practical oneness of the church and give ourselves to be built up with others as the church.

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Paul further indicates how we can arrive at the oneness of the faith when he contrasts "the oneness of the faith" in Ephesians 4:13 with "every wind of teaching" in the following verse, thus distinguishing the faith from teachings, or doctrines. We need to care for this crucial distinction as we journey toward the oneness of the faith, lest we elevate a particular teaching or practice to the level of the faith and produce division as a result. Whereas the faith is common to all believers and produces oneness (Titus 1:4), teachings and practices are not part of the faith and can easily become "winds" that carry us away into division. Our oneness as believers is of the faith, not of doctrines, teachings, or practices—no matter how scriptural these may be. We do well to take the following exhortation from Witness Lee to heart:

> We must be exceedingly clear regarding the difference between the faith and doctrine. The faith is uniquely one, but doctrine may vary. Thus, the faith unites, but doctrine may divide. With the faith there is surely oneness, but with doctrine there is the possibility of division. (*CWWL, 1968* 1:376)

Although we should contend for the faith (Jude 3), we should not contend for things other than the faith, such as doctrines and practices, and we certainly should not divide ourselves from our fellow believers over such things. Rather, we should "receive all the genuine believers who hold the fundamental faith of the New Testament, even though they may differ from us in doctrinal concepts, for God has received them as His children (Rom. 14:3)" (Lee, *CWWL, 1971* 2:475). This requires that we exercise the broadness and generality that Paul speaks of in Romans 14—15, receiving those

believers whom God and Christ have received (Rom. 14:3; 15:7), even if they are "weak in faith" (Rom. 14:1). The faith at which we are arriving consists of the clear contents of God's economy, that is, God in Christ as the Spirit redeeming human beings to be perfected into the oneness of the church as the Body of Christ, consummating as the New Jerusalem for God's glorious eternal expression. Everything else pales in significance, and none of it should be our focus, our cause, or even our delight, even if it is entirely scriptural. We understand baptism by immersion as proper and scriptural, but we will not contend for it or be divided by it. We understand that the bread and the wine of our weekly table meeting are spiritually the body and blood of Christ, but we will not take a stand against Catholics, Lutherans, and Zwinglians for their different understandings of the one church meeting that should show our oneness as His Body. From our study of the Bible we understand that Christ will rapture some of His believers before the great tribulation (and some after!), but we have no desire to fight for this and wound those for whom Christ has died. The examples to make the contrast between the faith and doctrines or practices are endless; they begin in the first century and continue to this very day. The things that divide us from one another as Christians are, simply put, not the faith, because the faith brings us to oneness and to the full knowledge of Christ and to the full measure of Christ, which is the church as His own Body.

When we reflect on the profound revelation in Ephesians 4 concerning the oneness of the faith, it becomes clear that to arrive at this oneness is actually to become something: the church as a full-grown man.

To discern between what the faith is and is not and to practice the oneness of the faith, even amid differences in doctrine and practice, require our growth in the divine life unto maturity. Paul emphasizes this need for growth in Ephesians 4:13 and its immediate context: To arrive at the oneness of the faith is to arrive at "a *full-grown* man" (Eph. 4:13, emphasis added), and our arriving at this full-grown man is "that we may be no longer *little children* tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14, emphasis added). It is the "little children," those believers who lack maturity in life, who are easily carried away into division by the winds of teaching. The organic antidote to being "tossed" and "carried about" is to grow in life unto maturity, that is, to arrive at a full-grown man. Paul further emphasizes the need for growth in verse 15: "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." Then in verse 16 he reveals that our growing up into Christ in all things issues in "the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love," indicating that the growth he is speaking of is for the building up of Christ's Body, not our individual spirituality. Thus, Paul helps us to realize that our growth in life unto maturity is the organic means for us to arrive at the oneness of the faith. Perceiving this connection between growing in life and arriving at the oneness of the faith, Witness Lee explains: "The more we grow in life, the more we will cleave to the faith and to the apprehension of Christ, and the more we will drop all the minor and meaner doctrinal concepts that cause divisions. Then we will arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness" (Eph. 4:13, note 2). Our growth in life, then, is essential to our arriving at the oneness of the faith.

When we reflect on the profound revelation in Ephesians 4 concerning the oneness of the faith, it becomes clear that to arrive at this oneness is actually to become something: the church as a full-grown man. We become this full-grown man through a process of growth, which depends on our ongoing apprehension of the faith not as a set of beliefs but as a great mystery. As we see and hold this mystery, we are becoming that corporate man who expresses the oneness of the faith. In this way, the faith that we apprehend and cleave to becomes the journey that defines our Christian life and culminates in the practical oneness of the church as its destination.

Creeds and Confessions of Faith

In Christ's resurrection and ascension "God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). Such confession marks the Christian life from its very inception, for at the time of their initial salvation the believers not only "believe in

[their] heart" but also "confess with [their] mouth Jesus as Lord" (Rom. 10:9), and Paul reminds Timothy that Timothy had "confessed the good confession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12), probably at his baptism. In the continuation of the Christian life the believers are charged to "offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name" (Heb. 13:15), and the Lord Himself promises to us: "Everyone therefore who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 10:32).

It is a great thing to express outwardly in words before other human beings what we confidently believe in our hearts, and this particularly in the face of persecution. Already in the New Testament, the believers confessed Christ to their own peril: "The Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). Persecution for their confession has remained a constant peril to the believers throughout the centuries, even to this very day. And yet, through the ages, God's faithful ones cannot but confess this highly exalted One, even at the cost of their own lives. Peter charges us all, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being always ready for a defense to everyone who asks of you an account concerning the hope which is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). This is good; this is necessary; this is noble. Particularly in the face of persecution, it is a great thing for God's people to testify of the great hope within them. Many a martyr has done so at the point of death.

Not only individual believers but also communities of believers have been called upon by those outside (whether those of the world or other Christians) to give an account of what they believe. The Lutherans did so in their 1530 Augsburg Confession at the behest of the emperor. The Reformed did so in their 1561 Belgic Confession, submitted to Philip II of Spain in the context of intense persecution. And we in the local churches have done so often—perhaps most extensively in *A Longer Response to "An Open Letter to the Leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the 'Local Churches.'"* Even outside the context of persecution, it is right and proper for communities of believers to give a brief summary account of what they believe and practice. And it is right and proper for individual local churches to publish accounts of what they believe and practice for the sake of outsiders, who may wish to be assured that a local church holds proper beliefs and practices. All these forms of explicit presentation of belief are right, proper, and necessary. We obviously do not agree with everything written in all such documents published over the course of the past millennia, but we can at least agree that to publish such documents is right and proper.

But these statements and documents are not the faith. The faith, as we have presented here, is the whole mystery of God's economy hidden throughout the ages but now revealed not only to the apostles and prophets but also through them to every believer, for Paul prays that God would grant to *all* the Ephesians "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph. 1:17). The faith is not a set of words or a list of doctrines but a revelation from God—a revelation of God, a revelation of all that God has done, and a revelation of all that God is doing in His economy to carry out His great intention. To see it, to grasp it, to believe it with our subjective faith, is to be swept up into that great economy for the carrying out of God's move on the earth. Written creeds and confessions, written accounts of beliefs and practices, written statements of faith—all of these are at best like eyewitness accounts written by those who have seen and entered into the divine scenery of the faith. To have memorized creeds and confessions, to have internalized their contents, and to have recited them hundreds of times over are not the same thing as to have seen and entered into the scenery of the faith, just as to have read, internalized, and memorized various accounts of the city of London are not the same thing as to have seen and inhabited the city for oneself. Creeds, confessions, statements of faith—these things are good and necessary for the outsider, but they are not essential to the life of the church, just as travel guides are helpful to those who have never been to London but are not needed by those who inhabit the city. It would be absurd for Londoners to pledge themselves to this or that particular London travel guide, to recite one

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whenever they gather together, to teach one to their children, to contend over which travel guide is the correct one, or to ostracize Londoners who subscribe to an alternative London travel guide.

And yet, tragically, this is precisely what the Christian church has done for centuries. It was good and right and noble for the early Christian church to declare to the world what it had seen in its various creeds, but it should have been entirely unnecessary for these creeds to be incorporated into the liturgy of the church. It was good and right and noble for the Lutherans to present to the world what they had seen in the Augsburg Confession, but it was entirely unnecessary for them to make this confession the binding and preeminent expression of the faith of the Lutheran communion. Millions of believers—including we ourselves in the local churches—have benefited greatly from the light received by the early church and by the Reformers, much of which is contained in their creeds and confessions as well as (and much more richly) in their other writings. What they genuinely received from the Lord has become a part of the rich inheritance that we all have received. But to pledge oneself to one of these documents, to make its utterances the definitive statement of the faith, to incorporate its language into the regular life of the church, is to admit to oneself that the steady progress of the church's understanding of the divine revelation has ceased to advance in one's own community. For creeds and confessions are often thought of not merely as true and accurate interpretations of the Scriptures but as summative and definitive interpretations. These are clearly two different things. It is a true and accurate statement to say that *Moby Dick* is about a whale, but this is hardly a definitive summary of the book. In a similar way, there are many true and accurate statements in the various creeds and confessions of the Christian traditions (along with some false and dangerous ones). But when these true and accurate statements are viewed as summative and definitive interpretations of the Scriptures, they inevitably become lenses through which their subscribers read the Scriptures, thereby limiting the light that such subscribers may receive from the Scriptures to the light available at the time those creeds and confessions were authored. One finds this posture in relation to creeds and confessions perhaps most prominently in Eastern Orthodoxy, the most theologically conservative of all the great Christian traditions. But one can find it likewise in prominent Protestant theologians. The Lutheran theologian Charles Porterfield Krauth (d. 1883), for instance, said of the unaltered Augsburg Confession, "The matchless hand of Melanchthon was employed in giving the most perfect form, the most absolutely finished statement of the faith" (262). Speaking with highest praise, Krauth thus says of the Lutheran pietists: "The position of them all was that the doctrines of our Church are the doctrines of God's Word, that no changes were needed, or could be allowed in them; that in doctrine her Reformation was complete, and that her sole need was by sound discipline to maintain, and by holy activity to exhibit, practically, her pure faith" (197). Given the complete and perfect form of the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the complete and perfect explanation of this confession in the other documents included in the 1580 Book of Concord, Krauth thus conjectures that no additions will ever need to be made to the Lutheran confessions:

> We do not think it likely that the Lutheran Church, as a whole, will ever add to her Symbols, not merely anything which can have such relations to them as the Augsburg Confession has (which would be impossible), but not even such as the Formula of Concord has. (273)

To commit oneself to a set of confessional words from the fourth or the sixteenth or the seventeenth century is to confess that the unfolding of the divine revelation ceased to progress at that time, or it is to confess that one has exited the stream of its progress.

One can find the same sentiment among some Reformed theologians. J. Gresham Machen (d. 1937), for instance, opines regarding the seventeenth-century Westminster Confession:

> I think it may well turn out that Christian doctrine in its great outlines, as set forth, for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, is now essentially complete. There may be improvements in a statement here and there, in the interests of greater precision, but hardly any such great advance as that which was made, for example, at the time of Augustine or at the Reformation. All the great central parts of the biblical system of doctrine have already been studied by the church and set forth in great creeds. (342)

Indeed, many Protestant seminaries have required an oath of their professors that they believe the creeds and confessions of their communions to be "a summary and just exhibition" of the teaching of the Scriptures—that these creeds and confessions are not only accurate and true but also apt summaries of the entire contents of divine revelation (e.g., Richard 607; *Brief* 23).

Such attitudes toward creeds and confessions inevitably limit their subscribers to the degree of understanding given to the Christian church up to the time those creeds and confessions were authored. An Eastern Orthodox monk on Mt. Athos in Greece is reported to have told a recent visitor, "Here it is still the fourth century" (Stewart 94), and many Eastern Orthodox are, indeed, stuck in the fourth century and would glory in this fact. Likewise, many Lutherans are stuck in the sixteenth century, and many Reformed are stuck in the seventeenth century, holding on to the light that was received at that time and thus admitting implicitly that there is nothing more to be seen. This, of course, would be right and noble if the unfolding of the divine revelation did in fact stop in the fourth century or in the sixteenth or in the seventeenth. But of course, we contend, it did not. The Word of God is too rich, too profound, too full of life and light, to be captive to a particular age or to a particular set of words. For as long as this long age of the church persists, the church's understanding of the Word of God will continue to progress until one day it reaches the highest plane and produces a people to usher in the kingdom of God. To commit oneself to a set of confessional words from the fourth or the sixteenth or the seventeenth century is to confess that the unfolding of the divine revelation ceased to progress at that time, or it is to confess that one has exited the stream of its progress. Statements of faith can be true, accurate, even enlightening—but they can never be wholly adequate as a definitive summary of the divine revelation. Rather than pledging themselves to some particular set of words, those in the steadily progressing stream of God's move should seek to fill the earth with ever new, fresh, living, and advancing accounts of the divine scenery of the faith.

> The faith, as the revelation of God's entire economy, should produce the practical oneness of the church as the one Body of Christ; and yet the various confessions of faith have rather divided the believers time and again. Just this bare fact should serve as sufficient judgment upon them.

Even worse, various Christian traditions—by pledging themselves to their various creeds and confessions—have inevitably (and often explicitly) divided themselves one from another. As is well known, the Roman Catholic Church explicitly teaches that the Scriptures must be interpreted in light of the creeds and indeed all the conciliar and papal determinations of that church. Vatican I, for instance, clearly teaches:

> In matters of faith and morals, affecting the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture which Holy Mother the Church has held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of Holy Scriptures. Therefore no one is allowed to interpret the same Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense or contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers. (*DH* §3007)

This clearly puts the published teachings of the Roman Catholic Church above the authority of the Scriptures, for the Scriptures are to be read in light of these teachings and not the other way around. What is perhaps less well known is that many of the major Protestant traditions are likewise bound by their various published creeds and confessions. As we saw above, many Protestant seminaries require confessional subscription of their professors, and many require the same of their ordained ministers. But the same subjection is often expected of even the unordained members of these communions. According to Krauth, "Every Christian is bound either to find a Church on Earth, pure in its whole faith, or to make one" (195). In his view Christians who do not agree with the Lutheran confessions in their entirety should not call themselves Lutherans and should not join themselves to the Lutheran communion. In this way, these communions admit to the world that they violate the apostle's charge by not receiving those whom God has received (Rom. 14:1-3; 15:7). All the great traditions of the Christian church recognize that there are genuine believers outside of their confessional boundaries, genuine children of God received by the Father. And yet they continue to employ their particular creeds and confessions to exclude the Father's own children from their particular communions. In this way, they have allowed their various confessions

of faith to destroy the very oneness that should be "of the faith" (Eph. 4:13). The faith, as the revelation of God's entire economy, should produce the practical oneness of the church as the one Body of Christ for God's move and for God's expression on the earth, and yet the various confessions of faith have rather divided the believers time and again. Just this bare fact should serve as sufficient judgment upon them, or at least upon how they have been employed in the history of the Christian church.

One final comment is in order regarding the Nicene Creed (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) before we close, for this creed in particular has increasingly been adopted even by some traditionally non-creedal Christian traditions. We appreciate the content of that creed, particularly insofar as it testified to a correct understanding of the Trinity in the context of the Arian attack on the truth, keeping the Christian church on the right course even to this day. But as a summary account of the faith, it surely falls short in manifold ways. In particular, it gives the impression that the various items of the faith are unrelated one to another, failing to capture the hinges, as it were, of the divine revelation. It speaks of Christ, and it speaks of the Spirit. But it does not tell us that Christ in resurrection became the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). It speaks of Christ as the One who saves, and it speaks of us whom He saves. But it does not tell us that Christ saves us by entering into us as the Spirit to beget us in the divine life as genuine sons of the Father, transforming us in the divine life and conforming us unto the glorious image of Christ. It speaks of the Triune God, and it speaks of the church. But it does not tell us that this church is the very organic Body of Christ, the organism of the Triune God for the Triune God's move and expression on earth. It speaks of our resurrection, and it speaks of the second coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead and to bring in His kingdom. But it does not tell us that this Christ will come to be glorified from within His saints (2 Thes. 1:10) and that the overcoming saints will rule and reign with Him. And regarding the New Jerusalem—the final consummation of God's eternal economy—the creed is entirely silent. By not attending to these hinges of the divine revelation—these organic connections between the items of the faith—the Nicene Creed gives the impression that the faith is merely a set of unrelated doctrines to be believed, and it lends itself to an entirely extrinsic understanding of the Christian life and church life. The faith is certainly to be believed, but it is not a set of unrelated and extrinsic doctrines to be merely believed. *The faith* is the entire mystery of God's eternal economy, unfolded in reality throughout the ages. And *our faith* sweeps us up into that economy, making us participants in it unto its consummation in eternity.

The faith is the entire mystery of God's eternal economy, unfolded in reality throughout the ages. And *our faith* sweeps us up into that economy, making us participants in it unto its consummation in eternity.

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GOD'S ECONOMY IN FAITH

Mitchell J. Kennard • David Yoon

Faith is universally regarded as a matter of central importance in the salvation and life of a believer in Christ. However, its equally central role in the carrying out of God's economy, that is, His plan and endeavor to accomplish His good pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9-11), has been little appreciated. In much of Christianity, faith in the objective sense is understood as the set of biblical teachings that one must believe in order to be saved. In the subjective sense faith is commonly understood as an assent to these and other teachings in the Bible as well as a trust in the promises of God, especially regarding salvation. Although such an understanding of faith can hardly be said to be wrong, it fails to capture the intrinsic significance and the broad scope of faith as revealed in the New Testament. This is because it centers on man's benefit, whereas the full and proper understanding of faith focuses on the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, for which man's salvation is the means. With man's need in view, the function of faith is seen primarily as saving human beings from the negative consequences of the fall through the redemptive death of Christ. God's purpose, however, necessitates that human beings be saved much more, on the positive side, in the resurrection life of Christ (Rom. 5:10) realized as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2)—to the extent that they become the glorious corporate expression of God (Rom. 8:29-30; 12:4-5). Therefore, we should not understand the contents of the objective faith as confined to God's initial salvation, which is primarily judicial in nature; they comprise the fullness of God's salvation in the believers, which can be carried out only by the eternal life and is therefore primarily organic in nature. The function of the subjective faith is accordingly not only to justify man but also to bring man into full participation in God's economy of salvation for the realization of His eternal purpose, which is to gain a corporate man expressing Him in glory (Gen. 1:26; Eph. 3:21; Rev. 21:2, 11).

Though many Christians appreciate that justification is by faith alone, few are aware that the whole of God's economy is in faith. In charging Timothy to hold to and defend the faith, Paul speaks of "God's economy, which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4), showing that faith is the very realm in which God's entire economy of salvation is carried out. This has nothing less than dispensational import, as it indicates that faith, rather than the law (1 Tim. 1:7-9), is the unique way for God to carry out His New Testament economy. It also has immense practical import for every believer: If we see that the objective faith includes the entirety of God's eternal economy, we will also see that our participation in His economy is a matter of partaking of His grace through faith (1 Tim. 1:14)—not of fleshly effort to fulfill the law. Whereas the law issues in death and condemnation (Gal. 3:21; Rom. 7:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:7, 9), faith issues in the enjoyment of eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; John 3:16), and salvation in the eternal life issues in the building up of the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16)—the great mystery of godliness, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16; 4:7; 6:3, 11; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3). Seeing that all of God's economy is a matter of faith will strengthen our subjective faith as the God-infused ability to substantiate His economy, bringing us into a richer participation in God's salvation for the fulfillment of His purpose (1 Tim. 1:14, 19; Heb. 11:1).

Though many Christians appreciate that justification is by faith alone, few are aware that the whole of God's economy is in faith.

As God's economy is in faith, the contents of His economy are equivalent to the items of the faith. And as Christ is the center and content of God's economy, the items of the faith encompass numerous aspects of the full history of Christ in His move to accomplish this economy, especially His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, as well as His indwelling the believers as the Spirit for the constitution and building up of His Body, which ultimately consummates in the New Jerusalem. Though these matters of the faith are objectively real, for them to be applied to us and experienced by us for our salvation, they must be substantiated by our subjective faith, the act of our believing. We gain this believing and receiving ability by the Spirit's impartation through the hearing of God's Word (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 10:17). Upon hearing the gospel and believing into Christ, we receive Him into us and are joined to Him in an organic union (John 3:16; 1:12; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 6:17). By being united to Christ, all that He objectively is and has accomplished historically becomes our subjective reality. In this light, faith in Christ denotes nothing less than mystical union with Him, for it is the purpose and effect of faith to bring us into Christ. Such a union is possible only because in resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), the Spirit of reality (John 14:17), who guides us into all the reality of Christ (John 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:8). Through this wonderful faith that receives Christ as the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 5), the riches of God and His salvation in Christ are dispensed into us for our full salvation. Thus, by faith we are not only justified but also regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and ultimately glorified for the producing of the Triune God's glorious corporate expression (Rom. 1:17; 5:10; 6:22; 8:16-17, 29-30; 12:2, 5). Truly, God's economy is in faith: all that He is, has, and has done in Christ is in faith; the hearing of faith produces believers as the participants in God's economy of salvation; and all that God intends to do in the believers for the accomplishment of His purpose is carried out by their continual receiving of the Spirit by faith.

God's Economy—the Objective Faith

It is crucial to see that although the New Testament presents many matters, it reveals one unique teaching as the faith: "the teaching…of the apostles" (Acts 2:42), which is also referred to as "the healthy teaching" (1 Tim. 1:10) or "the teaching" (Titus 1:9). Just as many ministers of the new covenant served in the one new covenant ministry (Acts 1:25; 2 Cor. 3:6, 8-9; 4:1; 6:4; 11:23), so also the many apostles taught the one teaching. Paul did not leave the essence of the apostles' teaching ambiguous but explicitly referred to the economy of God as the governing vision of this teaching. In the opening of 1 Timothy he recalled his exhortation to his younger co-worker to remain in Ephesus in order that he might charge certain ones not to teach things that differ from God's economy, which is in faith (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Paul equates God's economy and the faith by drawing a direct parallel between those who had "misaimed" from the mark of God's economy, with its positive issues of "a good conscience" and "unfeigned faith" (1 Tim. 1:4-6), and those who had become "shipwrecked regarding the faith," thrusting away "faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:19). Therefore, the unique teaching allowed by the apostles was the economy of God, and they regarded all teachings that differed or distracted from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy as winds of teaching that waylay the believers from arriving at the oneness of the faith (Eph. 4:13-14) and even carry them away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 6:10, 21). In accordance with this thought, to be "healthy in the faith" (Titus 1:13) is to remain under "the healthy teaching," the apostles' teaching concerning God's New Testament economy in faith (1 Tim. 1:4, 10). Therefore, in Paul's mind, the faith is the divine economy, the centrality and universality of the apostles' unique teaching.

The apostles regarded all teachings that differed or distracted from the unique revelation of God's New Testament economy as winds of teaching that waylay the believers from arriving at the oneness of the faith and even carry them away from the faith.

Great light is shed on the central role of faith in God's economy by juxtaposing Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 1:4 with Ephesians 3:9-12. In the former, Paul states that God's economy is in faith. In the latter, he declares that God made "the eternal purpose,"

which is His economy (Eph. 3:9), "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Here the Greek word translated "made" (ἐποίησεν, *epoiēsen*) may be rendered "accomplished," "carried out," or "fulfilled," and the Greek word translated "in" (ἐν, *en*) has not only locative but also elemental and instrumental meaning. Hence, this verse implies that the economy of God not only was conceived in Christ but also is fulfilled in Christ as the sphere, with Christ as the element, through Christ as the means, and ultimately for Christ as the goal (cf. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16). Ephesians 3 reveals God's economy as His household arrangement to dispense "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) through the proclamation of the word of God as the gospel (Eph. 3:2, 6). The issue of this dispensing is the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:10, 6; 1:22-23), the universal expression of "the multifarious wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Immediately after unveiling God's economy in Christ in Ephesians 3:9-11, Paul turns to the perspective of the believers and says, "In [Christ] we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him" (Eph. 3:12). Here Paul emphasizes the role of faith, as he did in 1 Timothy 1:4. Comparing these two portions shows that God's purpose *in Christ* is carried out through His economy *in faith* because it is by faith that we are joined to Christ—that we are "in Him" (1 Cor. 6:17; 1:30)—and that we, having obtained access unto God the Father and into the grace of God through Christ (Eph. 2:18; Rom. 5:1-2), may come forward to God with boldness (Heb. 7:25; 10:19-22; 4:16). Since faith unites us with Christ, the only One through whom we can come to God the Father, our Savior (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 1:1-2; 2:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:21), faith is the unique path for us to approach God, enjoy His grace and salvation, and participate in His economy (Rom. 5:20; Eph. 2:8; Heb. 2:3).

All that God does for the accomplishment of His purpose is in Christ. Therefore, only by the subjective faith, which brings us into union with Christ, may we substantiate the contents of the divine economy as the objective faith and participate in its fulfillment.

It is of crucial importance to see such a lofty and profound vision of God's economy as the objective faith revealed in the Word of God, because it is according to this vision that God in Christ as the Spirit infuses into us the subjective faith, the God-imparted ability by which we substantiate the contents of the divine economy as the objective faith. The subjective faith, our believing and receiving ability within us, is an issue, a product, of having a proper vision of the objective faith, that is, God's economy. A low and narrow vision of God's economy limits our participation in His economy, whereas a high and extensive vision of God's economy uplifts our participation in the divine economy. Therefore, we need to ask the Father of glory to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation and enlighten the eyes of our heart as we prayerfully read the Word of God and continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles concerning the divine economy (Eph. 1:17-18). This will enable us to be perfected in the objective faith by seeing the profound vision of God's economy, while also strengthening our subjective faith to partake of His economy in a rich and bountiful way.

The Subjective Faith—Faith in Christ to Substantiate the Contents of God's Economy

All that God does for the accomplishment of His purpose is in Christ. Therefore, only by the subjective faith, which brings us into union with Christ, may we substantiate the contents of the divine economy as the objective faith and participate in its fulfillment (Eph. 1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17). By faith in Christ the believers receive and experience all that He is, all the processes He has undergone, including His death, resurrection, and ascension, and all the procedures of God's full salvation, including redemption, justification, regeneration, sanctification, transformation, and glorification. Such a rich participation in Christ and His salvation through faith fulfills the goal of God's economy to gain the Body of Christ as God's corporate expression.

Faith in Christ—an Organic and Spiritual Union with Christ

The apostle Paul's frequent expression *faith in Christ*

points not only to Christ as the object of our faith but also to our union with Him. When we hear "the word of the truth, the gospel of [our] salvation" (Eph. 1:13), we not only believe *in* Christ but also believe *into* Christ, thereby entering into Him (1 Cor. 1:30) and receiving Him into us (John 1:12; Col. 2:6). For this reason, faith denotes much more than an objective agreeing with the facts in the Bible; more intrinsically, it denotes a subjective union between the believers and Christ—one in which the believers receive God's dispensing of His divine life through His word and His Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 5).

In Romans 11 Paul portrays faith in Christ as an organic union between Him and the believers by using the metaphor of grafting: "By faith" (Rom. 11:20) the Gentile believers, who were formerly branches of the wild olive tree, are grafted into Christ as the cultivated olive tree to partake of its fatness—that is, to participate in the unsearchable riches of Christ (Rom. 11:17-19, 23-24; Eph. 3:8). As a consequence of this grafting, the believers are organically joined to the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit in order to bear fruit to God (Rom. 7:4), growing together with Him in the likeness of His death and in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom. 6:5). When a branch from the uncultivated tree is cut off from its original source and grafted into the cultivated olive tree, all the history of the cultivated olive tree becomes the history of the branch. This picture points to the wonderful truth that when we believed into the Lord Jesus, we were put into an organic union with Him, in which all that He passed through, including His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, becomes our history.

Faith denotes much more than an objective agreeing with the facts in the Bible; more intrinsically, it denotes a subjective union between the believers and Christ in which they receive God's dispensing of His divine life through His word and His Spirit.

In our experience faith is nothing less than Christ as the Spirit, who has been imparted into us and joined to us. Paul identifies Christ, the Son of God, with faith when he speaks of "the faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22) and "the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). These genitives may be considered appositional, identifying faith with Jesus Christ, just as the appositional expression *the peace of Christ* (Col. 3:15) indicates that Christ is peace (Eph. 2:14). Faith may be said to be Christ Himself, because He is the Author (Originator) and Perfecter (Completer) of our faith (Heb. 12:2). The identification of faith with Christ is further confirmed by comparing parallel passages in the Scriptures: just as the Father has qualified us "for a share of the allotted portion of the saints" (Col. 1:12), giving us a share of Christ as our joint portion with all the saints, so also God has "allotted" the equally precious faith to us as our common portion (2 Pet. 1:1). Further, the precious Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:4, 7), who is the precious faith, is realized as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17), and in harmony with this truth, Paul identifies faith with the Spirit in Galatians 5:5: "We by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness." Witness Lee notes that in 5:5 "*the Spirit* and *faith* are in apposition. The Spirit is the faith, and the faith is the Spirit" (*CWWL, 1985* 3:505). In F. F. Bruce's words, "To live by faith…is tantamount to 'living by the Spirit' ([Gal.] 5:25)" (145). Hence, for the believers to "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7) is for them to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). In Paul's understanding, faith is nothing less than Christ as the Spirit who has been imparted into us and joined to us.

Paul associates faith not only with the divine Spirit but also with the believers' regenerated human spirit. In 2 Corinthians 4:13 he says, "Having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak." Commenting on the word *spirit* in this verse, Henry Alford says, "Not *distinctly* the *Holy Spirit*,—but still not merely *a human disposition*: the indwelling Holy Spirit penetrates and characterizes the whole renewed man" (269). In *Word Studies in the New Testament* Marvin R. Vincent agrees: "*Spirit* of faith: not distinctly the Holy Spirit, nor, on the other hand, a human faculty or disposition, but blending both" (313). The spirit of faith is our human spirit joined to and mingled with the resurrected Lord as the life-giving Spirit through regeneration (1 Cor. 6:17; 15:45b; John 3:6). Witness Lee equates the believers' faith with their mingled spirit: "The phrase *spirit of faith* places *the spirit* in apposition to *faith.* Faith is of the spirit. Therefore, the spirit of faith is faith. Our faith is just the mingled

spirit" (*CWWL, 1985* 3:486-487). "Faith in Jesus Christ," through which we "have believed into Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:16; 3:22), refers to "the bond of union with the risen Christ" (Bruce 145). Since our mingled spirit—our human spirit born of, indwelt by, and mingled with the Lord as the Spirit—is the reality of our organic union with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; John 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22), our mingled spirit may be said to be our faith. The truth that our mingled spirit is our faith itself is echoed by the apostle John in 1 John 5:4: "Everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith." Here "our faith" is identified with our mingled spirit, for that which overcomes the world is both our faith and "everything that has been begotten of God," which refers to the regenerated spirit of the believer because "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). From this perspective, it is by standing firm in our spirit (Phil. 1:27) that we can stand by faith (Rom. 11:20; 2 Cor. 1:24); it is by praying in our spirit (Eph. 6:18; 1 Cor. 14:15) that we can pray in faith (James 1:6; 5:15; Mark 11:24); and it is by walking according to our spirit (Rom. 8:4) that we can walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). It is only by exercising our spirit of faith, our mingled spirit as the practicality of our union with the Lord, that we may substantiate all the contents of God's eternal economy. When we walk according to our spirit of faith, thereby abiding in a spiritual union with the Lord, all His person, possession, work, and accomplishments, which are the contents of God's economy, become our intrinsic reality in our experience.

Subjective Faith—a Spirit of Faith for Receiving Salvation and Substantiating Christ's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension

The Word of God contains many divine and spiritual facts concerning the person and work of Christ for the accomplishment of the full economy of God and for the completion of the good pleasure of His will. As such, these facts are the very contents of the New Testament faith, and it is worth examining in detail in what follows how the person and work of Christ constitute the objective faith. But it is also necessary to see that in order for the word of the gospel concerning these precious facts to profit us, we need to mix that word with faith, receiving the word by exercising our spirit of faith (Heb. 4:2). Thus, by our subjective faith we experience Christ's person and work for our complete salvation, which are the crucial elements of God's New Testament economy as the objective faith.

The New Testament makes it clear that, first of all, the redemption accomplished by Christ through His vicarious death on the cross is for the whole world (1 John 2:2; John 1:29; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:6). However, the New Testament also indicates that since salvation is granted only to those who believe, not everyone in the world will be saved. While "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," it is incumbent upon every human being to believe into Him that he or she would not perish but would have eternal life (John 3:16). Likewise, although "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world" but to save the world (John 3:17), only those who believe into the Son are not condemned, "but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). In a similar vein, Paul tells Timothy that "our Savior God…desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3-4), yet He is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10) because only by faith can human beings receive the salvation God prepared for them. Therefore, even though the provision of Christ's redemption is freely available to all human beings, salvation can be appropriated only by believing into Him through faith.

In order for the word of the gospel to profit us, we need to mix that word with faith, receiving the word by exercising our spirit of faith.

But further, Paul in his Epistles clearly reveals that Christ not only died for sinners but also died with them (Rom. 6:6, 8; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 2:20; 3:3). To the apostle Paul, however, the believers' co-death with Christ was not merely an objective historical fact but also a subjective reality in his daily life (1 Cor. 15:31; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:10). The believers' co-crucifixion with Christ was an experiential reality for Paul because he lived in faith, that is, in an organic union with Christ. This is evident in his testimony in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live *in faith, the faith of the Son of God*, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (emphasis

added). The terminating crucifixion of Christ was applied to Paul day by day because he continually lived in "the faith of the Son of God." When we exercise our spirit of faith to see, believe, and lay hold of our co-crucifixion with Christ as an objective and divinely revealed fact in the Scriptures, we spontaneously reckon ourselves to be dead to sin in Christ (Rom. 6:11). In doing so, we are enabled by the Spirit of Jesus Christ to have the subjective experience of dying with Christ and putting to death the practices of the body (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:24-25).

Faith in Christ partakes of the reality not only of Christ's redeeming and terminating death but also of His life-imparting resurrection and His all-surpassing ascension. In Ephesians 2:5-8 Paul reveals faith as the means by which the believers substantiate their co-resurrection and co-ascension with Christ: "Even when we were dead in offenses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,… for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." The transcendent salvation executed by God in Christ to make us alive with Christ, to raise us up together with Christ, and to seat us together with Christ in the heavenlies is not only accomplished "by grace" on the part of God but also appropriated "through faith" on the part of the believers (Eph. 2:8). In an earlier portion of Ephesians Paul says that "the surpassing greatness" of God's power, "which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all," is "toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19-21). God's surpassingly great power—the power that overcame death, the grave, and Hades to raise Christ from the dead (Acts 2:24) and to seat Him at the right hand of God in the heavenlies, far above all His enemies—is transmitted to and experienced by those who believe. God's exceedingly great power of resurrection and ascension is applied to those who exercise their spirit of faith to see, know, believe, and receive this power (Eph. 1:17-18). By doing so, they not only enjoy the power of resurrection to overcome the law of sin and of death, any attack from the gates of Hades, and any tribulation and persecution instigated by Satan (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:2; Matt. 16:18) but also enjoy the power of ascension to overcome all of God's enemies, transcending Satan and his "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:12). Elsewhere Paul declares that the believers were "made alive together with [Christ]" and "were raised together with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:12-13). By virtue of our organic union with Christ through our believing into Him, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into the heavens as historical, accomplished facts have become our very history, and by our abiding in Christ through walking according to our spirit of faith, these historical facts become our personal experience and subjective reality (John 15:4).

Paul says that "the surpassing greatness" of God's power, "which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all," is "toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19-21).

Subjective Faith—Receiving Christ as Righteousness for Our Justification

Christ's complete and eternal work of redemption, which issues from His death, resurrection, and ascension, is likewise a precious part of the objective faith that can be appropriated only through the exercise of God-given subjective faith. That redemption begins with the forgiveness of sins, which is received through faith (Acts 10:43), and, more significantly, includes justification, which is God's New Testament way to make His believers righteous based solely on faith. In Paul's words, "the righteousness of God is revealed in [the gospel] out of faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17), and "the righteousness of God has been manifested…through the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe" (Rom. 3:21-22). Paul speaks not only of "righteousness which is out of faith" (Rom. 9:30; 10:6) but also of "righteousness of the faith" (Rom. 4:11). The former expression clearly indicates that in the believers' experience of justification, righteousness issues from faith, while the latter expression implies that righteousness is equivalent to faith. Accordingly, Paul states plainly that just as Abraham, our father of faith, "believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3, 9;

Gen. 15:6), so also is the faith of a person who "believes on Him who justifies the ungodly…accounted as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). The identification of righteousness with faith is further reinforced by the truth that the believers in Christ are said to be justified "in His blood" as well as "through faith in His blood" (Rom. 5:9; 3:24-25). The redemption in Christ's blood is part of the objective faith (1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6, 13), but it is by our faith in this fact that we experience the efficacy of the redeeming blood of Christ and are joined to Him to be justified before God and thereby approved by God according to the standard of His righteousness (Rom. 3:25).

The believers are justified not only in the blood of Christ but also in Christ Himself by faith, as Paul states in his gospel message in Acts 13:39: "And from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified." In the words of Galatians 2:17, this is for the believers "to be justified in Christ." It is only by entering into an organic union with Christ by believing into Him and receiving Him into us (John 1:12; 3:15-16) that we can be justified in "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (1 John 2:1). Apart from being in Christ—that is, apart from being joined to Christ by faith—we can neither partake of His work of redemption nor be justified by God. Christ's righteous person and redemptive work have nothing to do with us as long as we are outside of Him. In the Old Testament picture of expiation, an Israelite would not only bring an animal offering but also lay his hands upon it to become identified with it (Exo. 29:10, 15, 19; Lev. 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 8:14, 18, 22; 16:21). This identification was the basis for the substitution—that is, for the offering being accepted on behalf of the Israelite. It is the same in the New Testament. God does not respond to our faith by accounting to us something of Christ apart from Christ. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told that the righteousness of Christ is ours through faith. Rather, by faith we are brought into a spiritual union with Christ, the righteousness of God (1 Cor. 1:30), so that in the eyes of God we are no longer condemned apart from Christ but are justified in Christ, "the righteous One" (Acts 3:14; 7:52). Redemption, which is the basis of justification, is "in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24), and the only way a sinner may enter into Christ in order to be redeemed for justification is through faith; hence, God "justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The believers' justification in their organic union with Christ is clearly stated in Galatians 2:16: "We also have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of faith in Christ." By believing into the resurrected Christ through God-infused faith, we are organically joined to Him (1 Cor. 6:17). In this union Christ becomes righteousness to us from God, and God reckons Christ as righteousness to us, justifying us once for all (1 Cor. 1:30).

This aspect of justification, as part of our redemption, is only initial and objective, and it is accomplished once for all when we believe into Christ and are thus ushered into an organic union with Him to receive Him as our righteousness. But there is another aspect of justification, a subjective aspect, which is based on the resurrection of Christ and is carried out gradually after our regeneration as we live by Him as our life and live Him out as our subjective righteousness (Rom. 4:25; Col. 3:4; Matt. 5:20; Phil. 1:21; 3:9).

The redemption in Christ's blood is part of the objective faith, but it is by our faith in this fact that we experience the efficacy of the redeeming blood of Christ and are joined to Him to be justified before God and thereby approved by God according to the standard of His righteousness.

Whereas objective justification, as part of God's judicial redemption, is a once-for-all, positional matter, subjective justification is the continual, dispositional process of God's organic salvation, by which the believers are made righteous not only outwardly but also inwardly and in all their living. The believers are subjectively justified by God "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"—in an organic union with Him—and "in the Spirit of our God," the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11; 15:45). As the believers "live to righteousness" and live "righteously" (1 Pet. 2:24; Titus 2:12), "being filled with the fruit of righteousness" and becoming "constituted righteous" in their inward parts (Phil. 1:11; Rom. 5:19), they are made "the righteousness of God" in Christ as well as the wife of the Lamb, clothed in "the righteousnesses of the saints" (2 Cor. 5:21; Rev.

19:8). Paul makes clear that just as we are justified objectively out of faith in Christ, so also we are justified subjectively through faith in Christ, not out of works of law. Before his conversion, Paul had attained the very height of what the flesh can do to work out a righteousness out of the law, saying that, "as to the righteousness which is in the law," he had even become blameless, at least in the eyes of man (Phil. 3:6). However, when he received the excellent knowledge concerning Christ Jesus, he counted all his previous attainments as loss, even as refuse (Phil. 3:7-8), and aspired to be "found in Him, not having [his] own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith" (Phil. 3:9). This means that Paul no longer endeavored to "establish [his] own righteousness" by trying to keep the law through the efforts of the flesh (Rom. 10:3); instead, he sought to be found in Christ in the condition of living and magnifying Christ as divine righteousness in his conduct. Such a righteousness derives solely from faith in Christ, from an organic union with Christ (Phil. 1:20-21). In the same vein, Paul wrote polemically to the Galatians that to seek to be "justified by law" is to be experientially "separated from Christ" and to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). Rather, we should "by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5). Instead of striving by the flesh (in contrast to "by the Spirit"—Gal. 3:3) to be justified out of the works of law (in contrast to "out of the hearing of faith"—Gal. 3:2), the believers should by faith rely wholly on Christ as their only merit before God, expecting Him as the hope of righteousness to be lived out of them as they abide in their organic union with Him as the Spirit. We should follow Paul's pattern to despise our own righteousness, which could never justify us before God, and pursue to be found in Christ, with whom we enjoy a marvelous organic union, that He as the Spirit could live out of us the righteousness "which is out of God and based on faith" (Phil. 3:9).

The focal points of God's economy of salvation in the divine life are for Him to supply the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit to the believers and for the believers to receive the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ by the hearing of faith.

Subjective Faith—Receiving the Spirit to Experience God's Salvation in Life

The focal points of God's economy of salvation in the divine life are for Him to supply the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit to the believers and for the believers to receive the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ by the hearing of faith (Phil. 1:19). In Galatians 3:1-2 Paul reminds the Galatians that when Jesus Christ was openly portrayed crucified before their eyes, they received the Spirit "out of the hearing of faith." This indicates that when the Galatians heard the "word of the faith," "the word of Christ," as the gospel announced by the apostle Paul (Rom. 10:8, 16-17) and saw a vision of the crucified Christ with the eyes of their heart, they believed in the crucified and resurrected Christ (Rom. 10:9-14) and received Him as the Spirit (John 1:12; 7:39; Acts 11:16-17; 19:2). In Galatians 3:3 Paul then asks the Galatians, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" This implies that even though the Galatians began their Christian life by receiving the Spirit out of the hearing of faith, they departed from the Spirit and lapsed into the flesh by turning to the works of law; instead, they should have remained in the Spirit continually to be perfected by the Spirit. Paul reinforces this notion in verse 5, which says that God "bountifully supplies…the Spirit" to the believers and that they receive the Spirit "out of the hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2). Paul's language strongly underscores God's present, ceaseless, and bountiful dispensing of the Spirit as the very supply that the believers need in order to grow and be perfected (Eph. 4:12-16). Throughout our Christian life we need to receive the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ by the hearing of faith, that is, by hearing the word proclaimed by new covenant ministers, which word reveals the contents of God's economy as the faith (Eph. 3:6-9; 2 Cor. 3:6, 8). Such ministry of the faith announces the unsearchable riches of Christ and imparts the life-giving Spirit to us.

Receiving the Spirit through faith occupies a place

of central importance in the believers' experience of God's complete salvation through the stages of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Although many believers rejoice in the truth that a believer is justified by faith in Christ, comparatively few appreciate the even more momentous truth that by faith in Christ they were regenerated to become children of God. It is of paramount importance to see that in Paul's view justification by faith issues in regeneration; indeed, justification is *for* the impartation of the divine life into the believers. For this reason, Paul speaks of "justification of life" (Rom. 5:18), declaring that "the righteous shall have life" (Rom. 1:17) and that the believers' spirit "is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10). The New Testament frequently bears witness that those who believe into the Son of God have eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 6:40, 47; 20:31; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 John 5:13). By receiving eternal life—the divine, uncreated, and indestructible life of the Triune God—through faith, we are begotten of God with His life and nature to become children of God (Heb. 7:16; 1 John 5:1). According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, eternal life is not merely everlasting joyful existence with God; it is Christ Himself, who referred to Himself as life (John 11:25; 14:6) and is realized as the Spirit of life, the life-giving Spirit (Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:45). When we believe *into* the beloved Son of God, in whom is the sonship, and thus are united and identified with the Son, who is experienced by us as the Spirit of God's Son, in Him we become sons of God (Gal. 4:6). For this reason, the apostle Paul declares to the Galatian believers, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). By believing into the Son, the embodiment of life (1 John 5:11), we receive Him as the life-giving Spirit and are begotten of God with His eternal life to become His many sons (John 1:4, 12-13; 7:38-39).

Through faith the believers are not only regenerated once for all but are also sanctified over the full course of their Christian life. Sanctification in the New Testament includes not only positional and objective sanctification, in which we are sanctified, separated unto God, by the Lord Jesus through His own blood (Heb. 13:12; 10:14; cf. Lev. 10:10), but also dispositional and subjective sanctification, in which we as "partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 6:4) "are being sanctified" by the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:11). This latter aspect of sanctification refers to our transformation in nature by and with the holy nature of God through partaking of His holiness (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 12:10) and becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). In Acts 26:18 the Lord Jesus spoke of the believers as "those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." Because faith in Christ produces a spiritual union with Him, "the Holy One" (Rev. 3:7), sanctification by faith in Him means that the believers are not only set apart from the world unto God but also permeated with His holy element in their entire being through the sanctifying operation of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 13:14). This is also confirmed in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, where Paul links sanctification with faith, saying, "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The accomplishment of God's complete salvation in the believers is dependent not only on the Spirit's sanctification but also on their believing the truth.

Receiving the Spirit through faith occupies a place of central importance in the believers' experience of God's complete salvation through the stages of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

According to John 17:17 sanctification is in the truth, and the truth is God's word. Ephesians 1:13 says, "In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." This means that to be sanctified—to which the sealing of the Holy Spirit refers—we need to exercise our spirit of faith to believe the word of the truth. Paul's words in Ephesians 5:26-27 also indicate that sanctification is through the word: Christ sanctifies the church, "cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish." Although we are sanctified by the Spirit through our belief in the truth at the time of our regeneration, there must be an ongoing sanctification throughout our Christian lives until we become the holy and glorious church as a corporate counterpart of Christ,

consummating in the holy city, the New Jerusalem, as the wife of the Lamb (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2, 9-11).

Our dispositional sanctification by the Spirit through believing the truth ultimately issues in our glorification. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 Paul says that "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,…unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." These verses indicate that by faith in the truth—the word of God—we participate in the sanctification of the Spirit and that glory is the goal of the Spirit's sanctification (Heb. 2:10-11). Similarly, Galatians 5:5 says, "We by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness." This hope that we await by the Spirit out of faith is none other than "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), and at Christ's manifestation we "also will be manifested with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). On the day of the Lord's return, He will come "to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed" (2 Thes. 1:10). Because all those who have believed in Christ, the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8), have received Him as the Spirit, He is within them hiddenly carrying out a work of sanctification and transforming them from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18), and at His coming He will be manifested from within them, causing their body of humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:17).

In the present age the goal of God's economy and of the believers' experience of God's full salvation in life through faith is the church as the mystical Body of Christ and the spiritual house of God. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul speaks of the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God, of which the Father is the source, the Son is the element, and the Spirit is the essence: "One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." When we believe and receive the one faith—the unique faith held by all genuine Christians—and are baptized through one baptism, we are organically joined to Christ as the one Lord, who is the embodiment of the one Father and is realized as the one Spirit, to become the one Body of Christ. Though the believers are many and come from diverse backgrounds, by faith they are made one (Gal. 3:26-28; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12). This is because through faith a dispensing occurs in which the one God in the one Lord as the one Spirit is dispensed into the one Body, resulting in a universal and corporate mingling of divinity and humanity. This mingling, effected by the Spirit through faith, is the reality of the Body of Christ for His organic enlargement and expression and constitutes the spiritual house for the Father's rest and satisfaction (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22).

In 1 Corinthians Paul reveals that by being organically joined to the unique and undivided Christ as the life-giving Spirit in their mingled spirit through faith (1 Cor. 1:13; 15:45b; 6:17), the believers in Christ

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are incorporated into Christ to be His members, the members of His one Body (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:12-13, 27). By remaining in our spiritual union with Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, created through our believing into Him (Col. 2:9), we may not only enjoy the "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" but also "drink one Spirit" for the realization of the "one hope"—"the hope of glory," the transfiguration of the "body of our humiliation" into the body of Christ's glory for the redemption of our body, the completion of our divine sonship (Eph. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:27; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23-25). Consequently, the one Body of Christ as the divine-human organism of the Triune God will grow and be built up in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

Faith in Christ makes the believers not only members of the organic Body of Christ but also branches of Christ as the true vine. In John 15 the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as "the true vine," the Father as "the husbandman," and the believers as the branches of the vine (John 15:1-2, 5). In the same chapter the Lord stated that the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from the Father, would testify concerning Him (John 15:26). The Spirit as the realization of Christ should be understood as the life sap, the life essence, of Christ the vine. In Romans 11 Paul reveals that it was by faith that the Gentiles were grafted into Christ to become branches in Him. In Paul's words, some in Israel "were broken off because of unbelief" (Rom. 11:20), but if

the Jews "do not continue in unbelief," they "will be grafted in" (Rom. 11:23). In contrast, the Gentile believers "were grafted in" (Rom. 11:17) because they "stand by faith" (Rom. 11:20). This means that the Gentiles were grafted into Christ as the cultivated olive tree by believing into Him, thus entering into an organic union (indicated by grafting) with Him. As they stand by faith, abiding in an organic union with Christ, they partake of "the root of fatness of the olive tree," the olive tree cultivated by God with Christ as life (Rom. 11:17). This is for them to abide in Christ as the true vine, enjoying the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ as the life essence of the vine, so that they may bear much fruit for the increase of Christ and the glorification of the Father (John 15:5, 8, 16; 3:29-30).

By their remaining under the hearing of faith and advancing in their experience of walking by faith, the believers are progressively brought through the stages of God's full salvation until Christ Himself is reproduced in them, constituting them in their entire being the reality of His organic Body.

Moreover, faith in Christ makes the believers living stones built into God's spiritual house. In 1 Peter 2:4-5 Peter tells us that the believers as "living stones" need to come to Christ as "a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious," so that they may be "built up as a spiritual house." In the immediately subsequent verses Peter highlights *believing*, unveiling that faith is the unique way for us to come to Christ: "For it is contained in Scripture: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a cornerstone, chosen and precious; and he who believes on Him shall by no means be put to shame.' To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner,'" (1 Pet. 2:6-7). It is by believing on Christ that we may experience the indwelling Christ as a living and precious stone in order to be transformed into living and precious stones so that we may be built together with others as the church, the spiritual house of God (1 Cor. 3:9-12; Eph. 2:20-21; 1 Tim. 3:15; Isa. 28:16).

All that the Triune God in Christ is, with all that He has done, is doing, and will do in His economy, is in faith (1 Tim. 1:4). Christ Himself in His person and work, as the centrality and universality of God's economy, is the contents of the objective faith, and as such, He is the unique One in whom we must believe. By believing into Christ, the believers are brought into an organic union with Him, which is realized as their mingled spirit, the spirit of faith. All the contents of the objective faith can be apprehended by the believers only through the subjective faith in their spirit, which faith is given by God by the transfusing of the Spirit through the proclamation of the word of Christ. When subjective faith in the believers lays hold on a reality in the divine economy as the objective faith—that is, on an aspect of the person of Christ or of His process to accomplish God's economy—what is objectively true in Christ becomes the believers' subjective experience and reality. Thus, by their remaining under the hearing of faith and advancing in their experience of walking by faith, the believers are progressively brought through the stages of God's full salvation, from judicial redemption through organic salvation, until Christ Himself in His glorified state is reproduced in them, constituting them in their entire being the reality of His organic Body for the Triune God's corporate expression and representation. In this way God's economy in Christ is carried out in the believers altogether in and through faith.

Faith in the Old Testament

Faith was not the main governing principle in God's Old Testament economy—the law was—but faith as a governing principle was nevertheless there. Paul speaks of the time of the law as a time "before faith came" (Gal. 3:23), but when the same Paul wishes to defend faith (even in the very same chapter!), he invariably appeals to the example of Abraham. The New Testament believers were not the first to be justified by faith apart from the law: "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). By their faith the Gentiles become not only sons of God (Gal. 3:26) but also sons of Abraham

(Gal. 3:7). Indeed, Paul's whole argument in Galatians 3 is that the law did not annul the promise that God made to Abraham and fulfilled in the New Testament. And if the law did not annul the promise, it likewise did not annul faith as the way to obtain the promise. When Paul describes the Old Testament as a time before faith came, then, he cannot mean that faith was wholly absent or inoperative. Instead, he simply means that faith was not yet the manifest principle of God's dealings with His people. His manifest principle at that time was indeed the law—and we need not here review Paul's rationale for the necessity of the law—but Paul's whole argument is that the law, needful though it was, did not annul the promises and therefore did not annul faith in the promises.

Abraham's believing unto righteousness was not the only one of the somewhat rare mentions of faith in the Old Testament that Paul drew upon, and Paul was not the only New Testament author to draw upon them. Both Paul and Peter quote Isaiah 28:16 in defense of faith: "For with the heart there is believing unto righteousness, and with the mouth there is confession unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes on Him shall not be put to shame'" (Rom. 10:10-11; cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6). Both John and Paul quote Isaiah 53:1 in condemnation of unbelief: "But though He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe into Him, that the word of the prophet Isaiah which he said might be fulfilled, 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" (John 12:37-38; cf. Rom. 10:16). And, of course, Paul was so captivated by Habakkuk 2:4 that he quoted it no less than three times in the New Testament: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, both to Jew first and to Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it out of faith to faith, as it is written, 'But the righteous shall have life and live by faith'" (Rom. 1:16-17; cf. Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

The apostles, then, were highly attentive to the instances where faith is mentioned explicitly in the text of the Old Testament, but beyond this they were able, with the eyes of faith, to see faith operating everywhere in the Old Testament, even when not explicitly mentioned. Hebrews, of course, is the clearest example, in which Paul tells the entire story of the Old Testament from the perspective of faith (Heb. 11). No explicit mention of faith or believing appears in the Old Testament stories of Abel, Enoch, and Noah, yet Paul tells us that all these and many more of the Old Testament saints lived and walked by faith. Many of the Jewish believers at Paul's time were in danger of returning to the law, convinced perhaps that by taking the way of faith they had abandoned their true inheritance as Israel. Paul contends that the Jewish believers were indeed in danger of abandoning their true inheritance as Israel—not by turning from law to faith but by returning from faith to law! The original inheritance of Israel was not law but faith. Their turn from law to faith in Christ was thus not a rejection of their ancient heritage but a return to their even more ancient heritage, the heritage of faith, which began with God's Old Testament saints and consummates with His New Testament people, for though the Old Testament saints "obtained a good testimony through their faith," they cannot be "made perfect" apart from us, the New Testament believers (Heb. 11:39-40).

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What shall we say, then, regarding the status of the Old Testament saints? Were they under law or were they under the grace of faith? As a general principle, we must say that God's people were under the law (Gal. 3:23), but Galatians 4 indicates that at least some in Israel were not under law but under the grace of faith. In Galatians 4 Paul contrasts the covenant of promise and the covenant of law as two Jerusalems. The covenant of law corresponds to "the Jerusalem which now is," but the covenant of promise corresponds to the "Jerusalem above" (Gal. 4:25-26). This Jerusalem above is no doubt John's "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2), composed not only of the New Testament saints (represented by the names of the twelve apostles—Rev. 21:14) but also of the Old Testament saints (represented by the names of the twelve tribes of the

sons of Israel—Rev. 21:12). This inclusion of the Old Testament saints in the New Jerusalem (corresponding to the covenant of promise) indicates that at least some in the Old Testament lived not under the law but under the grace of faith.

Theirs was the time of the law, not the time of faith, and yet faith still operated, for though Christ Himself had not yet come, God provided, in addition to the law, a multitude of sacrifices and offerings as types of the coming Christ (Heb. 9:8-15; 10:1-18). The proper Old Testament saints delighted in the law insofar as it manifested God, but as for themselves, they accepted its condemnation (Rom. 7:7-24) and thus turned to the sacrifices and offerings for their reconciliation with God. And yet they recognized that it was not these sacrifices themselves that reconciled them, for throughout the Old Testament we find a clear realization that the sacrifices in and of themselves are of no value (1 Sam. 15:22; Psa. 40:6-9; 50:13; Isa. 1:11; Micah 6:6-7; Hosea 6:6). The proper Old Testament saints recognized that these sacrifices pointed toward the coming Christ, for the prophets describe the coming Messiah in explicitly sacrificial terms: "He makes Himself an offering for sin" and will thereby "bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:10-11). It was not the sacrifices in and of themselves that reconciled the children of Israel to God. God accepted the sacrifices only insofar as they pointed to Christ, and God justified the sacrificers only insofar as they had faith.

Not only does God's New Testament economy work because of faith, so too did God's Old Testament economy. And Paul seems to recognize this fact when he uses two distinct prepositions in his description of the relationship of Israel and the Gentiles to faith in Romans 3:29-30.

Paul makes this connection between the Old Testament sacrifices and the coming Christ directly on several occasions: "Therefore, coming into the world, He says, 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me'" (Heb. 10:5). Paul makes an even stronger case in Romans 3:23-26:

> All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth as a propitiation place through faith in His blood, for the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred, with a view to the demonstrating of His righteousness in the present time, so that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus.

God "passed over" the sins of Israel in light of what He intended to do in Christ, and thus the sacrifices of Israel were of no inherent value without Him. When the Old Testament saints offered the sacrifices and when the high priest sprinkled blood on the cover of the Ark in the Holy of Holies, God justified not because of "the blood of bulls and goats" (Heb. 10:4) but because He saw, in the sacrifices and in the covering of the Ark, types of the coming Christ and because He saw the faith of the Old Testament saints in those types. Thus, what was operating among the saints then was not a "law…of works" but "the law of faith," because God covered their sins through the sacrifices with a view to Christ's ultimate and perfect sacrifice to come, and the Old Testament saints, even if they did not know what was coming, had faith that their sins were indeed covered (Rom. 3:27).

Not only does God's New Testament economy work because of faith, so too did God's Old Testament economy. And Paul seems to recognize this fact when he uses two distinct prepositions in his description of the relationship of Israel and the Gentiles to faith in Romans 3:29-30:

> Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also, if indeed God is one, who will justify the circumcision out of faith and the uncircumcision through faith.

God justifies the Gentiles *through* faith; God justifies the Jews *out of* faith. It is not entirely clear what Paul means by this distinction, and he does not consistently use this distinction when speaking of justification in other places. But he clearly seems to be making a fine distinction here by varying the prepositions, and so we do well to consider the meaning. We might say that the Jews, already in faith, are justified immediately *out of* faith. But the Gentiles, who are far off from God and from the promises of God (Eph. 2:12-13), must

first enter into faith in order to be justified out of faith, thus being justified *through* faith. By way of example, one enters his or her own backyard *out of* the house, while the stranger enters that same backyard *through* the house. Israel was the original inhabitant of faith in God's economy; for the Gentiles to enter into God's economy, they must first enter into faith.

Throughout the ages, God's people have always responded to the revelation of God by their faith, and their faith has brought them into all that He has done and is doing in His economy.

Conclusion

God's entire economy—both in the New Testament and in the Old Testament—is altogether "in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4). God's economy is not carried out in the realm of the law—the realm of what we are and what we can do in our natural being and with our natural resources. God's economy is carried out in the realm of the faith—the realm of what God has done and is doing in Christ for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. Throughout the ages, God's people have always responded to the revelation of God by their faith, and their faith has brought them into all that He has done and is doing in His economy. In the Old Testament, faith brought God's people into His economy through types, figures, and shadows. In the New Testament, faith brings God's people into His economy in substance, reality, and fulfillment (Col. 2:16-17). Without faith, all that God has promised and called us to do seems impossible (Num. 13:31—14:4), and indeed it is impossible in ourselves (John 15:5). But when we mix with faith what God has promised and called us to do (Heb. 4:2), these same impossible things not only seem possible—they are actually made possible. This is because our faith does not simply acknowledge and trust but also substantiates all the spiritual, unseen realities, receiving them and causing them to operate in our being to usher us into God's great economy for the fulfillment of His great plan. Sarah's faith did not simply trust that God would grant her a son; "by faith… Sarah herself *received* power to conceive seed" (Heb. 11:11, emphasis added). God promised a son, and Sarah's faith caused that promise to be effective for the carrying out of God's intention. And it is the same with us today. If we look at ourselves, we cannot but be discouraged. But if we look at God, at what God has done, and at what God is doing, we cannot but be infused with faith—the very faith that brings us into God's economy and causes God's economy to progress through the ages until its consummation in "the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

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"The Believers"—the Basic Designation of God's New Testament People

Given the primacy of faith in unlocking all the riches of God's economy, it should come as no surprise that the basic designation of God's people in the New Testament is "the believers." According to one enumeration, this designation is used almost eighty times in the New Testament, making it one of the most frequent in God's Word (Trebilco, *Self-Designations* 68). The importance of this designation is further highlighted by the fact that it is the only common designation in the New Testament with an opposite. The authors of the New Testament speak not only of *believers* but also of *unbelievers*, and on several occasions they employ these two designations to divide the entire human race: "What concord does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with

an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:15; cf. 1 Cor. 14:22; 1 Pet. 2:7). The Old Testament divides the entire human race into Israel and the Gentiles; the New Testament divides the entire human race into believers and unbelievers. Christians, then, are believers. Believing is the defining and distinguishing characteristic of their life, just as unbelief is the defining and distinguishing characteristic of the life of non-Christians.

We commonly speak today of various "faiths" (e.g., "the Islamic faith") and call their followers "believers" of various kinds, but we should not allow this modern familiarity to obscure the strangeness of the designation in the New Testament, for there are only scant known instances of *believers* as an absolute designation prior to the New Testament (Trebilco, *Self-Designations* 118). Greek writers, of course, spoke of those who believe this or that thing (e.g., those who believe in God). But with rare exception, they did not use *believer* as an absolute designation without further specification (e.g., those who believe), and *unbeliever* seems to have been even more rare as an absolute designation prior to the New Testament (Trebilco, *Outsider* 46). Because early descriptions of Christians by outsiders do not employ these designations, they seem to have been new creations of the Christian church—designations that arose from within the church's own understanding of its basic identity rather than designations adopted from the outside, as the designation *Christian* seems to have been (Trebilco, *Self-Designations* 120-121). When outsiders looked at the church and asked themselves what they should call its members, they settled on the designation *Christians* (Acts 11:26). When the church itself asked this same question, it settled on the designation *believers*.

It might be supposed that *believer* became the basic designation of the Christian in the New Testament due to the bare fact that faith is the initiation into Christian existence and is thus an appropriate boundary marker in a person's life. Faith is indeed the threshold of Christian existence, the entrance into all the riches of God's New Testament economy. But the designation *believer* implies much more than this. The New Testament on occasion speaks of those "who have believed" (e.g., 2 Thes. 1:10; Heb. 4:3), employing an aorist or perfect participle in Greek. But the existence of these rarer instances highlights the fact that the New Testament predominantly employs the present tense participle (Wallace 621n22). We are not simply those who "have believed"; we are those who now believe. Believing is not simply something we did one time long ago to secure our eternal salvation. Our distinguishing and distinctive quality is our continual believing for our ongoing participation in God's economy.

We do not believe just anything, of course. As the proverb says, "The simple man believes every word" (Prov. 14:15). We do not believe when we hear of so-called gods, ancient or modern. And yet when we hear that God framed the universe by His word, we cannot but believe. When we hear that God created humankind in His own image and according to His own likeness, we cannot but believe. And when we hear that the infinite God became a human being named Jesus, that He lived a perfect human life, died on a cross, rose on the third day, ascended to the heights, and breathed Himself as the Spirit into His disciples to produce the church that will bring in the kingdom and consummate the New Jerusalem, we cannot but believe into such a One! And beyond this, we believe that He is with us, we believe that He is moving among us, and we believe that He is working through us for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Why do we believe these things? Not because we are unduly credulous or because we have critically weighed evidence and argument. We believe because the God of glory has appeared to us in the word of the gospel (Acts 7:2; 2 Cor. 4:4-6), and we continue to believe because we look away to the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We persevere in faith because we have seen the unseen One (Heb. 11:27)!

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"I LIVE IN FAITH"

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE SPHERE AND ELEMENT OF FAITH

Jim Batten • John-Paul Petrash

In his Epistle to the Galatians, in a verse that is well known among Christians today, the apostle Paul opens a window to us concerning his own living as a believer. In Galatians 2:20 he testifies, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." In reading this verse it is easy, perhaps, to gloss over the expression *I live in faith* without much consideration. Indeed, some of us may be tempted to stop reading midway through the verse, content to know that we, like Paul, have been crucified with Christ and that it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. But Paul's train of thought does not stop there. He continues by telling us how he lived as a terminated and resurrected person: he lived in faith. Paul's utterance here—"I live in faith"—helps us to realize that faith is crucial not only for the initiation of our Christian life but also for its continuation. Indeed, the apostle's words suggest that faith is the very realm in which we live the Christian life. Like the apostle Paul, we can live the Christian life by the ongoing exercise of faith. What is more, we can live such a life even though we are still living in the flesh, which so often troubles and discourages us in our Christian life and church life.

Understandably, the mere mention of living in faith might produce anxiety in at least some of us, for our faith, it seems, is often weak and tepid. How can we possibly live the Christian life by such a (seemingly) weak faith? Thankfully, Paul's thought in Galatians 2:20 does not end with his statement that "I live in faith." He continues by testifying that the faith in which he lives is in fact "the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." This is as wonderful as it is mysterious. The faith in which Paul lived was not his own faith, generated from his own efforts to trust in God, but rather the very faith of the Son of God. The apostle's reference to the faith *of* the Son of God, rather than to faith *in* the Son of God, suggests that he experienced Christ the Son as the source of his faith, his believing ability, not simply as the object of his faith. And his reference to living in the Son's faith suggests that his dependence upon the Son as his faith was an ongoing reality, not a completed act in the past. Through Paul's exercise of faith—the very faith of the Son of God—he received the divine, spiritual supply needed to live the Christian life. And through our exercise of faith today, we can receive the same supply for our own living of the Christian life.

Of course, Paul's word in Galatians 2:20 is not the only direct mention in the New Testament of living by faith. Habakkuk 2:4, which says that "the righteous one will live by his faith," is quoted three times in the Epistles (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38), and these quotations are meaningful not only because of what they reveal about justification by faith but also because of what they reveal about how we as believers can live the Christian life. Indeed, Paul's quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17—translated as "the righteous shall have life and live by faith" in the Recovery Version—encapsulates the basic structure of his entire Epistle, which covers not only our being justified by faith (Rom. 1—5) but also our having the life of Christ (Rom. 5—8) and, further still, our living by this life (Rom. 12—16). Faith is needed not only for our justification and for our receiving of the divine life but also for our living of the Christian life in all its facets and intricacies, including our functioning as members of the Body of Christ in the church life on the highest plane (Rom. 12:4-8) and even our being subject to authorities on the most mundane plane (Rom. 13:1-7). Romans thus reveals that the full compass of our Christian life—portrayed in such rich detail in chapters 12 through 16—is by faith.

A similar emphasis on living by faith can be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which quotes Habakkuk 2:4 toward the end of chapter 10. The author of

Hebrews urges the Hebrew believers, who were at risk of shrinking back to Judaism, to "live by faith" even amid persecution, reminding them that "we are not of those who shrink back to ruin but of those who have faith to the gaining of the soul" (Heb. 10:38-39). In the following chapter he then encourages the Hebrew believers to take the way of faith, the way of living and walking by faith, by pointing to the "good testimony" obtained by those in the Old Testament, such as Abel, Abraham, and Moses, who also took this way (Heb. 11:2-40). In chapter 12 he offers further encouragement to the Hebrew believers to take the way of faith, urging them to "run with endurance the race which is set before us" by "looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). Hebrews, like Romans, thus gives us a strong impression that faith is needed for our living. To obtain the testimony that we are well pleasing to God, as Enoch did (Heb. 11:5), it is not sufficient for us simply to have faith for our initial salvation; we also need to live by this faith continually. This calls for the ongoing exercise of faith in our daily living and even for the increase and perfecting of our faith.

The entirety of our living as believers is in faith and by faith. This means that our living by faith encompasses much more than our trusting in God's provision for our material needs, though this is certainly a precious aspect of living by faith.

These direct mentions in the Epistles of living in and by faith give us a clear impression that faith is crucial not only for the initiation of our Christian life but also for its continuation. The entirety of our living as believers is in faith and by faith. This means that our living by faith encompasses much more than our trusting in God's provision for our material needs, though this is certainly a precious aspect of living by faith. As we will see in more detail in what follows, faith characterizes the ongoing experience of our Christian life and church life. Indeed, faith is the unique means for us as believers to live, walk, and serve in a manner that corresponds with and carries out God's economy. Apart from faith, we simply cannot live the Christian life according to God's intention.

Since faith is so crucial for our living as believers, we should treasure the precious faith allotted to us (2 Pet. 1:1) and seek to grow and be perfected in our faith (2 Thes. 1:3; 1 Thes. 3:10). Our living by faith depends upon our growth in faith, and thus there is the real need for our faith to develop. We highlight this need for faith's development in the first major section of this article. In the second major section, we focus on two keys to our growth in faith for our living in faith: remaining under the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:5) and looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Through these two organic provisions revealed in the Epistles, we have the way to grow in faith and to live in faith throughout the full course of our Christian life. In the third and final major section, we consider three practical expressions of living by faith: speaking by the spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13), praying with faith (Matt. 21:21-22), and walking by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). These practices—speaking, praying, and walking—characterize a living that is by faith, and our consideration of them should give us a broader and more concrete understanding of what living by faith looks like in practice.

Our Need to Grow in Faith for Our Living in Faith

Treasuring the Precious Faith Allotted to Us

To live by faith and grow in faith, we must treasure the faith that God gives to us. The apostle Peter tells the believers who heard the gospel and believed it that they were "allotted faith equally precious as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1). *Faith* in this verse refers to our believing in Christ, but the fact that faith has been allotted to us seems to indicate that it existed apart from us and was given to us by God when we heard the preaching of the gospel. God gives faith to us in the preaching of the gospel to enable us to substantiate the divine reality of the truth that is preached. God allots this precious faith to us through the word of His New Testament economy and through the Spirit's operation, and this faith responds to make the reality of the word preached substantial to us. As a result, the truth that we hear becomes experiential to us and fundamentally changes us, becoming a new element in our lives as believers.

Therefore, faith is objective to us in relation to the divine truth, but it becomes subjective to us when, through its substantiation, it brings the truth with all its contents into us. In this way, the divine realities, including faith itself, become experiential to us. Such a substantiation of the divine reality is indeed precious.

To illustrate, suppose we are in front of a factory containing many machines for producing luxury cars, but its door is closed. As a result, we are ignorant as to the contents of the factory. But when the door is opened, we can see the marvelous sight of the machines that make the cars. The machines are the contents of the production process, and seeing these machines substantiates this process to us. The machines exist while the door is closed, and the view also exists, but neither is real to us. But with the opening of the door, the seeing is given to us, and the machines become real. We may say that the machines are wonderful and that the seeing of the machines is likewise wonderful. In fact, we may value the seeing as much as the machines themselves because it is the seeing that makes the machines real and experiential to us.

Faith that substantiates the divine realities to us operates not only in our initial salvation but also throughout our Christian life. Hence, our life is a life of faith. When we hear the word of the truth, if our heart is turned toward God, faith accompanies it to substantiate this reality to us and bring it into us to become an element in our life. For example, a new Christian may be taught that as a believer he is now in Christ, but the truth of his being in Christ may not be real or substantial to him, thus having no impact on his living. However, later with a seeking heart he may read a publication such as *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee, in which Nee expounds the truth concerning our being in Christ (32-40). Nee likens our being in Christ to the tribe of Levi's being in the loins of their forefather Abraham. What Abraham did in giving tithes to Melchizedek, the tribe of Levi also did, because they were in his loins (Heb. 7:9-10). Likewise, because the believers are in Christ, they were in Christ when Christ died and resurrected; therefore, all the power of Christ's death and resurrection is already theirs. As this new Christian receives this word, God may give him the faith that substantiates this truth, and from that point on, this faith becomes an element in his life that never leaves him.

What also makes this faith precious is that it is allotted to us "in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1). Jesus Christ is both our God and our Savior. His two titles here imply two aspects of righteousness: the righteousness of God and the righteousness of Christ. Christ's death on the cross in absolute obedience to God has accomplished an act unique in righteousness (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 10:4-10). Christ, the only righteous One, died on behalf of us, the unrighteous, and through His death He accomplished redemption for us (Heb. 9:12). Based on Christ's perfect redemption, God in His righteousness justifies all the believers in Christ (Rom. 3:26). Thus, as our Savior, Christ has become our righteousness through His righteous act, and as God, He justifies us in His justice because Christ's redemption has met all of God's righteous demands on us (Rom. 3:24-26). The righteousness of both God and Christ is the sphere in which God allots the faith equally precious to both Jews and Gentiles for their substantiating of all the blessings of the New Testament. Faith is not allotted to us due to any effort on our part to act righteously but solely because of the grace freely given to us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

> In reading the Gospels, we find that the Lord was burdened for His disciples to grow in their faith so that they might eventually learn to live by faith. He was not satisfied with their having only a little faith, and He thus rebuked them on several occasions for their lack of faith.

Faith is also precious because it is our inheritance. To allot in 2 Peter 1:1 is to apportion an inheritance, just as the land of Canaan was allotted to Israel as an inheritance. The tribes of Israel each received an allotment of the land as their inheritance, equal in nature to all the other allotments of the good land but differing in size. We all have received an allotment of faith as an inheritance, equally precious in nature although varying in size. In the New Testament the mention of inheritance often refers to Christ Himself as our portion (Col. 1:12; 2:6; Eph. 1:14; Acts 20:32; 26:18). In this verse, however, the faith by which we

substantiate and enjoy Christ as our inheritance (Eph. 3:17) is itself the inheritance allotted to us. How precious it is that God has given us not only Christ as our inheritance but also the faith that substantiates Christ! Once faith has been allotted to us, we never lose it; it is our inheritance, more precious than gold. Any other kind of belief can be relinquished, but a believer in Christ can never truly give up Christ, because this precious faith always compels him to believe.

Growing and Being Perfected in Our Faith

Although the faith allotted to every believer is "equally precious" (2 Pet. 1:1), it is such only in a qualitative sense, not in the sense of perfection. Therefore, we should not rest content simply with the fact that we have faith, wonderful though this is, but should seek to grow and be perfected in our faith. The New Testament offers us much encouragement in this direction. In 2 Corinthians, for instance, Paul indicates that the Corinthians were abounding in faith (2 Cor. 8:7) and tells them that their faith was increasing (2 Cor. 10:15), and in 2 Thessalonians he tells the Thessalonians that their faith was growing exceedingly (2 Thes. 1:3). Our faith, then, should increase and even grow exceedingly.

In reading the Gospels, we find that the Lord was burdened for His disciples to grow in their faith so that they might eventually learn to live by faith. He was not satisfied with their having only a little faith, and He thus rebuked them on several occasions for their lack of faith. In Matthew 8, for instance, when Jesus and His disciples were on a boat amid a great tempest and His disciples roused Him from sleep, convinced that they were perishing, He said to them, "Why are you cowardly, you of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26). And in Matthew 16, when the disciples were reasoning among themselves because they had forgotten to take bread, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, saying, "Why are you reasoning among yourselves, you of little faith, because you have no bread?" (Matt. 16:8). Similar rebukes, directed toward the disciples' lack of faith, can be found in other passages in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 6:30; 17:20; Mark 16:14). In marked contrast, we find several instances in the Gospels where the Lord commended the faith of those who were not His disciples. He marveled at the faith of the centurion whose slave was ill, saying, "Not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Luke 7:9; cf. Matt. 8:10). He praised the faith of the Canaanite woman, saying to her, "O woman, great is your faith!" (Matt. 15:28). And He told the woman with a flow of blood, who touched the hem of His garment, "Daughter, your faith has healed you" (Mark 5:34). This contrast suggests that the Lord held His own disciples to a higher standard in the matter of faith. He wanted them to grow in faith, not simply to have faith, so that they might learn to live by faith, and He discipled them to this end—not only during His earthly ministry but also after His death and resurrection (John 21:1-14). As those who aspire to follow the Lord as His present-day disciples, we can be encouraged that the Lord is also discipling us in the matter of faith so that our faith in Him will develop.

Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians are especially germane to this subject of faith's development. These Epistles, addressed to new believers in Christ, reveal that the faith of the believers needs to be perfected, or completed, and that this development in faith enables the believers to live what Witness Lee aptly calls a "holy life for the church life" (*Life-study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* 115). In these Epistles we touch Paul's appreciation and intimate concern for the Thessalonians' faith in both its objective and subjective aspects. The opening chapters of 1 Thessalonians reveal how faith was produced in the Thessalonians. Through Paul's speaking and pattern the gospel came to them not only in word but also "in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance" (1 Thes. 1:5), and they received the word of the gospel preached by Paul "in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thes. 1:6). They accepted this word "not as the word of men" but as "the word of God," which operates in those who believe (1 Thes. 2:13). Through the operation of God's living word, faith was produced in the Thessalonians, and their faith became so prevailing that Paul says to them, "From you the word of the Lord has sounded out; not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place, your faith toward God has gone out" (1 Thes. 1:8). Thus, the "word of the Lord" that the Thessalonians accepted became their "faith toward God." Moreover, their faith toward God had a profound impact on their living, as Paul recounts in 1 Thessalonians 1: among other things, they "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God and await His Son from the heavens" (1 Thes. 1:9-10), became a pattern to the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (1 Thes. 1:7), and began to live the church life in sanctification grounded upon their "work of faith" (1 Thes. 1:3).

Although Paul surely appreciated the Thessalonians' faith toward God, he also recognized that their faith had yet to be completed (1 Thes. 3:10). He was concerned that the Thessalonians, as new converts, would be shaken in their faith because of the afflictions they faced (1 Thes. 3:3). His deep concern for the Thessalonians' faith is especially manifest in

1 Thessalonians 3, where he speaks directly of their faith five times in the short span of nine verses: In verse 2 he tells the Thessalonians that "we sent Timothy…to establish and encourage you for the sake of your faith," and in verse 5 he tells them that he "sent to find out concerning your faith, lest perhaps the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain." In verse 6 Paul recounts how Timothy, after visiting the Thessalonians, brought to him the "good news" of their faith, and in verse 7 he confides that "we were comforted because of you…through your faith." Although Paul was comforted through the Thessalonians' faith, he tells them in verse 10 that he was petitioning God exceedingly "so that we may see your face and complete the things that are lacking in your faith." The latter part of this verse—"complete the things that are lacking in your faith"—warrants further consideration. Both the objective and subjective aspects of faith seem to be in view here. The reference to "the things that are lacking" points to objective realities, constitutive of the objective faith, that the Thessalonians had yet to see and apprehend, while the reference to "your faith" points to the Thessalonians' subjective apprehension of the faith. In his fatherly consideration of the Thessalonians, Paul realized that they had not yet received a full view of the faith, that is, of the contents of God's New Testament economy. Because their view of the objective faith was incomplete, there was some lack in the strength and intensity of their subjective faith. But Paul was hopeful that, through his coming to them, the Thessalonians could be perfected in their faith, namely, by their entering into a full appreciation and realization of the contents of the faith.

Like the Thessalonians, we may have an incomplete view of the faith, and thus we may find that our ability to believe is not as vigorous as it ought to be. Thankfully, there is an antidote. We need to see and receive the full contents of the faith in an ongoing way, remaining under the marvelous view of God's economy revealed to us in the New Testament. Our further apprehension of this view will strengthen our subjective faith so that, like the faith of the Thessalonians, our faith can grow exceedingly (2 Thes. 1:3). In the context of 1 Thessalonians, this apprehension takes place as we receive "the word of the Lord"—the word that encapsulates and conveys the contents of the faith—in such a way that it becomes our "faith toward God" (1 Thes. 1:8).

According to Paul's realization the completion of the Thessalonians' faith was not an end in itself but, rather, a crucial factor in their living of a holy life for the church life. The flow of thought in 1 Thessalonians 3 suggests that the strengthening of the Thessalonians in their faith would result in God's establishing of their hearts "blameless in holiness" (1 Thes. 3:13). This inward establishing of their hearts, in turn, would enable them to live a life in sanctification, as described in chapter 4, and even to be sanctified wholly by the God of peace Himself (1 Thes. 5:23). The Thessalonians could not live such a holy life (in a sustained way, at least) without being established and perfected in their faith. This explains Paul's eagerness to see them face to face (1 Thes. 3:10).

First Thessalonians helps us to understand that we can be established in our living of a holy church life through the completion of the things lacking in our faith. This completion takes place as we apprehend the full contents of the faith, revealed in rich detail in the Epistles. As our view of the faith expands, our subjective faith will be strengthened, enabling us to "walk in a manner worthy of God" and even to abound in such a walk (1 Thes. 2:12; 4:1).

The Organic Culmination of Faith: Offering Our Faith as a Sacrifice to God

The growth of the precious faith allotted to us has an organic culmination, which the apostle Paul brings to light in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians. In verse 17 he says, "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with you all." The expression *the sacrifice and service of your faith* is most striking, for it indicates that the Philippians' faith was both a sacrifice, worthy of being offered to God, and an aspect of their priestly service to God. That Paul conceives of the Philippians' faith as a sacrifice implies that the faith he has in view here is a substantial and subjective faith, a faith constituted into the Philippians such that it had become *their* faith, which they could subsequently offer to God as a sacrifice. It should be evident that Paul is not speaking here mainly of faith in its objective aspect, as if he expected the Philippians to somehow offer to God the common faith in which they believed. But neither is he speaking simply of faith as the Philippians' act of believing, for it is difficult to understand how this believing act in itself could constitute a sacrifice capable of being offered to God. What the apostle seems to have in mind is not faith as the act of sacrificing but rather faith as the sacrifice itself, as the thing offered to God. In likening the Philippians' faith to a sacrifice, Paul's emphasis seems to be on faith as the organic produce and culmination of the Philippians' experience

of Christ, an experience detailed throughout his Epistle to them and fostered by his own ministry and pattern. Paul recognized that something precious was being produced within the Philippians through their gradual, cumulative experience of Christ, and in Philippians 2:17 he fittingly describes this as their faith.

How did the Philippians come to have faith to such a degree that it could be offered to God as a sacrifice? Paul's recurring emphasis in his Epistle on the experience and enjoyment of Christ gives us ample reason to believe that the Philippians' faith was the result of their experience and enjoyment of Christ. Through Paul's ministry to them, the Philippians were brought into the "joy of the faith" (Phil. 1:25), that is, into the enjoyment of Christ that springs from the subjective realization of the objective faith. This enjoyment of Christ, in turn, constituted the Philippians with the subjective, substantial faith that Paul recognizes in Philippians 2 as a sacrifice, worthy of being offered to God for His satisfaction.

> The expression *the sacrifice and service of your faith* is most striking, for it indicates that the Philippians' faith was both a sacrifice, worthy of being offered to God, and an aspect of their priestly service to God.

Like the believers in Philippi, we today can experience Christ to such an extent that the faith produced within us will constitute a sacrifice, which we can offer to God as part of our priestly service to Him. Paul's reference in Philippians 2:17 to "the sacrifice and service of your faith" thus opens to us a precious vein in the gold mine of faith, a vein that is surely worthy of our exploration. As we learn to live Christ, gain Christ, be found in Christ, and even do all things in Christ in our daily life (Phil. 1:21; 3:8, 9; 4:13), we can be assured that faith is being produced in us as a sacrifice that we can offer to God.

Provisions for Growing in Faith

As we have seen, our growth in faith is crucial for our living in faith. It is pertinent at this point to consider two provisions for our growing in faith: remaining under the hearing of faith and looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith.

Remaining under the Hearing of Faith

Faith in Christ, the faith by which we are justified by God (Gal. 2:16), issues from the hearing of Him. We are believers because we are hearers: if we had never heard the gospel, we would never have believed. Hence, the New Testament frequently mentions the connection between hearing and believing (John 5:24; Acts 4:4; 15:7; Rom. 10:14; Eph. 1:13; cf. Rev. 3:20).

In Galatians the hearing of faith stands in sharp contrast to the works of law (Gal. 3:2, 5). The law was the basis for God's relationship with man in the Old Testament, requiring man to exert his effort to fulfill its requirements, whereas faith is the principle for man to contact God in the New Testament. The Old Testament was the dispensation of the law, but now the dispensation has changed. Faith has come, and we are no longer under law (Gal. 3:25). In the New Testament dispensation, when the gospel is preached, a person hears that he is not required to strive in his flesh to please God, but instead, God desires to be everything to him. God intends to bless him. Thus, for his sake God became a man, lived a human life on earth, and died to accomplish redemption for him. He resurrected from the dead and has become the life-giving Spirit. He is calling people to receive Him, eagerly expecting to come into them to be their life and everything so that they may be one with Him. As a person hears this well speaking concerning God and all the good things of God's well speaking toward him, an appreciation for the Lord Jesus is awakened within. Spontaneously, he calls on the name of Jesus and receives Him, accepts Him, and is joined to Him. He immediately begins to partake of and enjoy Jesus. This is the faith that we receive from God, which comes to us by our hearing (Rom. 10:14, 17; Eph. 1:13) and is called "the hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2, 5).

Since faith comes to us by hearing, we must treasure the hearing of faith. The Galatians had received the Spirit through the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2), but the Judaizers bewitched them, bringing them back under the law and into their flesh. The teaching of the law aroused the desire of the flesh to exalt itself in doing the works of the law for a self-made righteousness (Gal. 3:1-3). The Galatians should have remained under the hearing of faith, continually receiving the Spirit whom God bountifully supplies for their perfecting, trusting

not in their works but in the operation of the Spirit. Only in this way could they participate in and enjoy God's promised blessing and live Christ (Gal. 3:14; 2:20).

The hearing of faith is the response to the preaching of the precious person of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God, and all that He has accomplished. When a living message is preached concerning Him, it arouses in those who hear an appreciation that causes them to call, receive, and partake of this wonderful person. Such a hearing depends not just on the written word alone but on the written word becoming the living word applied to us by the Spirit who operates within us (Col. 3:16). Therefore, it is crucial that we hear living messages centered on the Son of God, His person and His work, and beware of teachings, even biblical ones, that are not centered on God's economy and that can be used by Satan to carry us away from the faith and cause us to lose our subjective faith (Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim. 1:3-5).

Looking Away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of Our Faith

Knowing that Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of our faith is another important provision for our growth in faith. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith." In ourselves we do not have any believing ability. In God's economy faith does not mean an ability that we have in ourselves to trust in God or believe in things we cannot see. We need to be deeply impressed that faith is not of us; its origin and source is the precious person of Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Author of faith. The Greek word for *Author* can also be translated "Originator." As the Author of faith, Jesus is the Originator of our faith in Him. He is the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ, who became the life-giving Spirit in order to enter into man (1 Cor. 15:45; John 20:21-22). When we look unto Him, He transfuses and infuses Himself with His believing element into us, and we spontaneously believe (John 1:12). The element of faith is imparted whenever a person even momentarily opens himself to look at Jesus (Acts 26:14-15). Faith is Jesus, the Author of faith, entering into us and believing for us. All that is needed on our part is to look at Him.

Jesus is also the Perfecter of our faith, its Finisher and Completer. We have seen that our faith is not yet complete; it needs to be perfected. We are still on the way, and we need to look unto Him for the completion of the faith in us that He originated. In His own life and path on earth Jesus originated this faith, and in His glory and on the throne in heaven He has perfected it. Now, as we walk the pathway of faith, looking unto Him, He infuses us with the very faith that He originated and perfected.

In Hebrews 12 the writer likens the Christian life to a race set before us that can be run only by looking away unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2). In a race every encumbrance must be put away, referring to every encumbering burden that might impede the runners. The encumbrances here include not giving heed more abundantly to the things spoken by the Lord (Heb. 2:1), an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from the living God (Heb. 3:12), not being brought on to maturity but lingering in the beginnings of the Christian life (Heb. 6:1-2), and a heart that is not sprinkled from an evil conscience (Heb. 10:22). These must be put away. So too must the particularly entangling sin, which in the case of the Hebrew believers may have been forsaking their assembling together as God's New Testament people and returning to the gatherings of their old religion (Heb. 10:25-26), that is, the observing of holy days and the participation in its feasts. They needed to strip off all such unnecessary weights in order to run the race. Running the race of the Christian life requires strong motivation. Only by looking away unto Jesus could they run this race. They needed to turn from every other thing and give Him their undivided attention. Then they would see Jesus, the wonderful One enthroned in heaven, "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9),

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who is the greatest attraction in the universe, like an immense magnet drawing all His seekers to Him. Without such a One, it would have been impossible for the Hebrew believers to look away from so many distracting things around them (Lee, Heb. 12:2, notes 1 and 2).

What does it mean to look unto Jesus? The apostle Peter tells us that we have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes, yet we love Him (1 Pet. 1:8). Nevertheless, the writer of Hebrews tells us that we can see Him (Heb. 2:9; 12:2, 14). Today, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, crowned with glory and honor. As our High Priest, He has entered into heaven and now ministers in the heavenly places, that is, the true tabernacle, which is in heaven. If we are to see Jesus according to Hebrews, we must come forward to the throne of grace in the Holy of Holies in heaven, where Jesus is (Heb. 4:16; 10:22; 9:12, 24). How is this possible while we are on earth? The secret is our spirit, referred to in Hebrews 4:12. Today, our human spirit, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, is the habitation of God (Eph. 2:22), and Christ, who is at the right hand of God in heaven (Rom. 8:34), is also within us, that is, in our spirit (Rom. 8:10; 2 Tim. 4:22). He is the heavenly ladder referred to in John 1:51 that joins earth to heaven and brings heaven to earth (Gen. 28:11-22). When we turn to our spirit, we enter the gate of heaven and touch the throne of grace in heaven, where we can see Jesus (Lee, Heb. 10:19, note 1).

To look away unto Jesus requires us to turn away from all the things of the earth, of our environment, and of our past, which are the things that occupy our thoughts and feelings. In Hebrews 4:12 the living word of God divides our spirit from our soul. Whenever we receive the word of God as the living word of the Spirit through prayer (Eph. 6:17-18), turning away from our mind, emotion, and will, and calling on the name of the Lord, we exercise our spirit (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:3). In spirit we see Jesus and realize that He is real, exalted, and glorified. There we enjoy Him as our High Priest, ministering heaven, the heavenly life, and the heavenly supply to us. At the same time, as the indwelling One, He stimulates the operation of His believing element within us for us to receive and enjoy all these heavenly things.

Practical Expressions of Living by Faith

Genuine faith will be expressed practically in our living in many ways. Here we will consider three particular expressions of living by faith: speaking by the spirit of faith, praying with God as our faith, and walking by faith, not by appearance.

Speaking by the Spirit of Faith

The apostle Paul says concerning his ministry, "And having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). Here we see that Paul ministered out of what he believed by the spirit of faith.

This is the only occurrence of the term *spirit of faith* in the New Testament. In this verse the apostle does not say that he speaks in the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), the divine person, or that he speaks by faith as a kind of faculty; rather, he says that he speaks by the spirit of faith, which is the Holy Spirit mingled with our human spirit (John 3:6; 4:24; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). In this phrase *spirit* and *faith* are notionally in apposition, indicating that the spirit of faith is faith and that faith is our mingled spirit. As we have seen, the hearing of faith through the preaching of the word of God produces faith. The more we hear the word, the more we will have faith, and this faith is the spirit. By such a spirit we speak the word that is the source of our faith, and the word that we speak becomes the source of faith in others. In the same way, the faith in them becomes the spirit by which they can speak the word. This is a cycle.

A believer should be a speaker, speaking for the Lord, speaking the Lord forth, and speaking the Lord into people, especially in the meetings of the church (1 Cor. 14:26, 31). It is a sad fact that many believers do not speak for the Lord. The reason for this is not that they do not have faith but that their exercise of faith is lacking. The key to the exercise of faith is our mingled spirit. Indeed, to speak by the spirit of faith, two steps are required. First, we need to receive the word of God prayerfully so that the word is applied to us and becomes the living word of the Spirit received in our spirit (Eph. 6:17-18). Second, we need to speak the word that we have received to others through the exercise of our mingled spirit, which practically is our faith (1 Cor. 14:32).

It is important to see that faith is in our spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit; doubts are in our mind. Therefore, we must deny our doubting thoughts and feelings and exercise our faith-filled spirit to speak the word of God. In the spirit of faith we can declare such truths as "Christ is making His home in my heart" (Eph. 3:17); "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); and "I am being conformed to Christ's death, and He as the resurrection life is working Himself into me" (Phil. 3:10; Gal. 4:19). Such speaking of the word, full of faith by the spirit of faith, will become the hearing of faith in those to whom we speak.

Speaking by the spirit of faith is of crucial importance for the accomplishing of God's will to have His corporate expression, the Body of Christ. This is evident from the context of the apostle's speaking concerning the spirit of faith. In the same chapter, Paul speaks about living a crucified life for the manifestation of the resurrection life so that as death operated in the apostles, life would operate in the believers (2 Cor. 4:7-14). Verse 14 indicates that it was by this mingled spirit of faith that the apostles lived a crucified life in resurrection for the carrying out of their ministry. Christ as the treasure in their earthen vessels was dwelling in their spirit with His excellent power of resurrection, enabling them to be conformed to His death. Such a life lived by such a mingled spirit became the ministry of the new covenant. This was a ministry of the Spirit, of righteousness, and in glory, and it was the vital factor for the believers to be built up as the Body of Christ for God's corporate expression to fulfill His eternal economy (Eph. 4:12, 15-16).

Praying with God as Our Faith

Another practical expression of living by faith is to pray with God as our faith. Matthew 21:22 says, "And all that you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive." We know that God answers our prayers if we pray in faith and that whether our prayer is effective depends on our faith (1 Cor. 13:2). However, we must admit that we have prayed for things and believed that God would answer our prayers, yet He did not. There is an apparent discrepancy between our experience in prayer and what the Lord says here. However, the context in which the Lord gave this teaching on prayer in Matthew 21 reveals something quite wonderful, namely, that in order to pray, we need God as our faith.

As the Lord was returning to Jerusalem after lodging in Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing a fig tree, He went to it but found that it had no fruit, only leaves. Then He cursed the tree, and it instantly dried up (Matt. 21:18-19). When the disciples saw this, they asked the Lord how this could happen. He answered them that if they had faith and did not doubt, they could do the same and more. They could say to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and it would happen (Matt. 21:20-21).

We need to be impressed that in the Gospel of Matthew the Lord was not acting in His status as God, although He was indeed the incarnated God, but in His status as a man (Matt. 4:4), and He expected that His disciples would do the same things that He did—and even greater things (John 14:12). He was a man who prayed to the mysterious God; He was a man who was one with God (John 10:30) and who lived in the presence of God without ceasing (John 8:29; 16:32); He was a man who trusted in God and not in Himself (1 Pet. 2:23; Luke 23:46); and He was a man in whom Satan, the ruler of the world, had nothing (John 14:30). He became hungry, and, being one with God, living in the presence of God, He recognized that this hunger was of God. Thus, He did not seek to satisfy His hunger according to His appetite. Then He saw a fig tree, a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jer. 24:2, 5, 8), and according to revelation He went to it, seeking fruit from it but not finding any. He immediately understood that God had selected this tree to be a sign to the nation of Israel, which had become fruitless to God, and He cursed it. In doing so, He acted in a manner seemingly contrary to His perfect human nature, which surely would have urged Him to be kind to nature, not to curse it, and not to react when His hunger could not be satisfied by the tree. Thus, His prayer that there would no longer be fruit from the tree forever was according to the will of God for this tree to become a sign to the nation of Israel, who had been given up by God because of their rejection of Christ, His anointed One (Matt. 21:43-44). The Lord Jesus had faith and did not doubt. Being under God's leading and praying according to revelation, He was absolutely one with God, mingled with God, and thus had God as His faith.

> That the apostle walked by faith rather than by appearance indicates that in his living and conduct he was regulated by what he believed, not by what he saw in his outward environment or by the temporary afflictions that he suffered.

From this we can see that the Lord's teaching concerning asking in prayer by believing is a teaching to motivate us, as men in the flesh like Him, to seek the same oneness with God that He had. We must put aside our prayers that are motivated by our desires, needs,

or aspirations and ask God to reveal His will to us according to His plan for the fulfillment of His heart's desire (Eph. 1:9-10; 3:9-11; Col. 1:9, 24-27). Then as we live in this manner, in oneness with God and according to revelation, He will reveal to us what He intends to do, and we will request this from Him. God and we become one; God becomes our faith so that we believe that we have already received what we have asked for (Mark 11:24).

Walking by Faith, Not by Appearance

A third practical expression of living by faith is to walk by faith rather than by appearance. The apostle Paul elucidates this matter of walking by faith in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, where he describes his own living and conduct as a minister of the new covenant. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 he testifies, "For we walk by faith, not by appearance." The contrast here between faith and appearance is instructive. To walk by faith is to walk by what we substantiate through our exercise of faith, whereas to walk by appearance is to walk by what we see in our environment. That the apostle walked by faith rather than by appearance indicates that in his living and conduct he was regulated by what he believed, not by what he saw in his outward environment or by the temporary afflictions that he suffered. The contrast between faith and appearance is also evident in 2 Corinthians 4:18, where Paul says that "we do not regard the things which are seen but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." By faith, which is "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), we substantiate all the unseen, eternal things that belong to the realm of faith, including God, Christ, the Spirit, and the eternal life. Our exercise of faith convinces and assures us that these unseen things are indeed real, much more real than the things that we see in our environment. As we learn to walk by faith, not by appearance, we are thus learning to regard the unseen, eternal things, which belong to the spiritual realm of faith, instead of the seen, temporary things, which belong to the temporary realm of sight.

> As we exercise to walk by faith, we can expect to pass through various trials ordained by the Lord, not to punish us but to perfect us in our faith. These trials can deliver us from the many things other than faith, such as our feelings, that we may rely upon as we follow the Lord.

The Lord's word to Thomas in John 20, spoken after His resurrection, supplies further encouragement to us to walk by faith rather than by sight. It was only after Thomas saw and touched Jesus' physical yet glorified body that he was willing to confess, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). But Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29). The Lord's word here is a clear commendation of the way of faith. We have not seen Jesus in a physical sense, yet we have believed into Him and are therefore blessed. The apostle Peter offers us similar encouragement concerning our believing into the Lord when he says, "Whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). It is most striking that, as believers, we believe into and love One whom we have not seen.

To walk by faith, then, is to walk by what we have believed and received rather than by what we see in our outward environment. We may encounter many things in our environment that we find perplexing and puzzling, and we may pass through heart-rending situations in which God seems absent. Our personal situation and condition may appear to contradict what we believe. In these circumstances it is all too easy for us to regard the things that we see in our environment and to consider that it is these things, the seen things, that really matter. They are, after all, right before our eyes, pressing upon us and even oppressing us. But we should bear in mind Paul's word to regard the unseen things, not the seen things. This word encourages us to exercise the precious faith within us. Through such an exercise the unseen things become so real to us that we live and act according to them, just as Noah, "having been divinely instructed concerning things not yet seen and being moved by pious fear, prepared an ark for the salvation of his house" (Heb. 11:7). And through such an exercise the seen things—including the many apparent problems and obstacles in our

circumstances—are annulled in the sense that they do not determine how we live and conduct ourselves.

The apostle Paul is surely a pattern to us of one who walked by faith rather than by appearance, exercising to regard the unseen, eternal things rather than the seen, temporary things. As to his own condition, he learned not to lose heart even though his outer man was decaying, for he realized—through the exercise of faith, no doubt—that his inner man was being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). He even learned not to be discouraged by his weaknesses but rather to boast in them "that the power of Christ might tabernacle" over him (2 Cor. 12:9). As to his environment, Paul learned not to regard the afflictions that he suffered but rather to experience "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort" in his afflictions so that he might "be able to comfort those who are in every affliction" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Through his exercise of faith Paul realized that the many hardships that he faced in his environment—including afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, and imprisonments (2 Cor. 6:4-5)—were for the producing and carrying out of the new covenant ministry (2 Cor. 3:8-9; 4:1; 6:3). He even realized that "our momentary lightness of affliction works out for us, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). As to his ministry and service, he learned to base his confidence on God (2 Cor. 1:9) and to rely upon the indwelling Christ—the "treasure in earthen vessels"—as the source of his supply so that "the excellency of the power may be of God," not out of himself (2 Cor. 4:7). And, incredibly, he learned not to be discouraged by the condition of the churches under his care but to esteem and care for them according to his realization, by faith, of God's high view of the church. He could thus boldly address the believers in Corinth as "the church of God which is in Corinth" and "the called saints" (1 Cor. 1:2), even though he was keenly aware of the many serious problems among them. All of this gives us a strong impression that the apostle Paul was one who walked by faith, not by appearance, and we should be encouraged to follow his pattern in our own walk.

As we exercise to walk by faith, we can expect to pass through various trials ordained by the Lord, not to punish us but to perfect us in our faith. These trials can deliver us from the many things other than faith, such as our feelings, that we may rely upon as we follow the Lord. In a tender word on learning to live by faith amid trials, Witness Lee describes some of the trials that we as believers might experience:

> Some trials will affect our feelings. They will cause us to lose our interest in serving the Lord, to lose our sense of the sweetness in taking this way, and to even lose our sense of encouragement from the Lord. Some trials will be problems in our family or problems related to our health. Some trials may be related to material things and financial matters. We may experience poverty and hardships. Some trials may be related to our work for the Lord. We may lack power and light, be unclear, and lack the Lord's leading. Our present situation will change, and we will not be able to touch the Lord's heart or know what to do. Many of us may become unclear and uncertain about the Lord's way and the Lord's heart. Some trials may be related to the result of our work. We may labor and work without seeing any results. Some trials may be related to our co-workers. They may neither understand us, sympathize with us, nor open to us. These are all trials…
>
> Sooner or later the Lord will bring us to a situation in which faith is the only way to follow Him. (*CWWL, 1959* 2:101-103)

As we pass through trials such as these, we can be assured that the Lord is training us to walk by faith, not by appearance. We can follow Him on the pathway of faith by continually looking away unto Him as the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Conclusion

The living that satisfies God and His intention is a living that is wholly in the realm of faith, for "without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him" (Heb. 11:6). God has allotted "equally precious" faith to each of us as His believers (2 Pet. 1:1), and we should treasure, maintain, and cultivate this precious faith so that it becomes the source and means of all that we do in our Christian life and church life, including our speaking, praying, and walking. We can live such a life—a life in faith—by remaining under the hearing of faith and by looking away unto Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Such a living, born out of a mature faith, will prepare us for the second coming of Christ, who as the Son of Man will seek to "find faith on the earth" when He returns (Luke 18:8).

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The Victory of FAITH

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As believers in Christ, we live in two realms simultaneously: the physical realm of seen things, which is corruptible and decaying, and the spiritual realm of unseen things, where the eternal purpose of God is carried out according to His perfect will. Because we are in the world but not of the world, as the Lord indicated to us (John 17:11, 14-15), our hope should not be in the things that are seen but in the things that are not seen. Yet the unseen things are not merely a hope for the future. We can participate in them today and thus live in the spiritual realm of God's eternal purpose while sojourning in the corruptible, physical realm. For this we must exercise subjective faith as "the substantiation of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), which things are Christ and all the spiritual realities in Him.

We are, however, faced with a problem: Satan operates through many means to frustrate us from grasping the unseen spiritual realities in Christ and making them real in our subjective experience. How are we to prevail against this satanic assault? The apostle John tells us: "This is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). Faith, then, not only enables us to substantiate the unseen realm; it empowers us to continue victoriously in it and to contend triumphantly for it. Although this realization in itself is enough to make any believer rejoice, we need to consider further how we can exercise our subjective faith unto victory in a practical, daily way.

Applying the Facts of Christ's Victory by Faith

The Bible records many divine facts regarding Christ's victory over every enemy. When we acknowledge and substantiate those accomplished facts by the exercise of faith, the Spirit of reality applies them to our inner being and makes them real in our subjective experience (John 16:13-15). Consequently, we spontaneously overcome Satan, his work, and the world usurped by him. It is a fact that Christ was manifested to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). It is a fact that He destroyed the devil and his power of death on the cross (Heb. 2:14). It is a fact that His resurrection overcame death (Acts 2:24). It is a fact that His ascension placed Him far above the devil and his power (Eph. 1:20-22). It is a fact that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). It is a fact that He lives in us and that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (Gal. 2:20; 1 John 4:4). It is a fact that He has crucified the world (Gal. 6:14), the old man (Rom. 6:6), and "the flesh with its passions and its lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Christ's many accomplishments are too numerous to list here, but they are fully unveiled in the New Testament, which is not only a record of God's saving work in Christ but also a book of bequests to the heirs of God's salvation. By daily acknowledging the facts of God's accomplished work in Christ and substantiating them by faith, we experience those facts as spiritual realities in our daily living.

For example, it is a fact that Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33). As we exercise our subjective faith to lay hold of Christ's objective victory over the world, the accomplished fact becomes our experience because faith ushers us into an organic union with the One who has already overcome the world: "You have overcome them [i.e., the false prophets as antichrists] because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Ultimately, our overcoming is effected by this union, as Witness Lee helps us to see:

> Our faith brings us into an organic union, and it is this organic union, not the faith directly, that overcomes the world. We may say that faith is the means for us to be united with the Triune God. By believing in the Lord Jesus, we are brought into an organic union with the Triune God; this union, produced by faith, then overcomes the world. (3:4011)

Moreover, our faith overcomes the world because we,

as those joined to the victorious One, have been begotten of His victorious life: "For everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith. And who is he who overcomes the world except him who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5). By exercising subjective faith to substantiate the victorious Christ and by enjoying the organic union with Him, we nullify the enemy's wiles to overwhelm us with despair concerning our inability to live victoriously in ourselves. The Lord desires that we live in the reality of His attainments, not in the futility of our own efforts to conquer the enemies that so easily subdue us. The victory is already ours because it is already His; we need only to enjoy it and remain in it.

In a classic account of faith's role in making the objective facts the subjective experience of the believers, Watchman Nee highlights the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in applying all the accomplishments of Christ to those who have been united to Him:

> The experience of the believers' spiritual life is fully based on the facts that God has accomplished for them. The facts are the basis, the experience is the accomplishment, and faith is the process. In other words, the facts are the cause, faith is the way, and experience is the result. The experience of the believers' spiritual life is just the end result, the final achievement…
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> Here we must never forget the Holy Spirit. Why does God's fact become man's experience through his faith? It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in God's facts shown in the Bible and when we claim these facts, the Holy Spirit will apply to us all the graces that God has accomplished for us in Christ, making them real to us in our lives. (*CWWN* 1:64-65)

We may illustrate this with a specific experiential example. In Galatians 2:20 Paul states, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." According to Romans 6:6 we too have been crucified with Christ; however, we may well doubt that this is true of us, particularly when we consider our personal experiences where the operation of the death of Christ was not manifested in our living. At some point, after seeing the divine fact and even declaring with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ," we become genuinely and convincingly assured that this is indeed an accomplished fact. If we are about to lose our temper, we can exercise faith in the Word of God in such a way, and the Spirit will apply the fact of Christ's crucifixion to our anger, thus terminating the outburst before it happens and assuring us of the potency of the cross in our living. Based on this assurance, we allow and enable Christ to live in and through us. Hence, the fact, which we have acknowledged through faith, becomes our experience.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we see a marvelous illustration in Paul's own experience, where he acknowledged the objective fact of Christ's resurrection and had faith in it, which issued in his subjective experience of the accomplished fact unto victory. Paul reminded the Corinthians that he had delivered to them that which he had received, that is, that Christ had been "raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). If there were no resurrection from the dead, as some believed, then Christ did not resurrect from the dead. In that case, the faith of the Corinthians would have been "vain" and "futile" (1 Cor. 15:13-14, 17), and they would have been (and we would be!) "of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). But by believing in the fact of Christ's resurrection as an item of the objective faith, Paul experienced the victory of resurrection subjectively: "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Therefore, he exhorted the Corinthians to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58) based on their faith in the resurrection as an accomplished fact. If they had lacked such faith, they would have been discouraged in their work for the Lord. But their labor, carried out in Christ's resurrection life

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and with His resurrection power, was "not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58), and Paul wanted to assure them of this. By holding so firmly to the fact of Christ's resurrection as an item of the objective faith, Paul experienced the victory of faith subjectively and had the faith that the Corinthians would experience it as well. What a wonder that we can experience that same victory today!

A problem that we sometimes face, however, is that we acknowledge the facts, but we believe they apply only to others and not to ourselves. We mistake our feelings for facts and our sufferings for failure, believing that these indicate a destiny of defeat. We must, however, remain firm in our faith (1 Pet. 5:9), realizing that we are well able to experience Christ's victory and to remain in it. In other words, every believer can experience the objective reality of Christ's victory because subjective faith functions to substantiate all the unseen spiritual realities in Christ, including His victory. No believer is an exception. To everyone who believes, God has given a spirit of power (2 Tim. 1:7), even a "spirit of faith" (2 Cor. 4:13); therefore, we must stand boldly in faith and resist the temptation to shrink back in cowardice. To be sure, we are positioned in Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6), and we must remind ourselves of this glorious fact daily. We are not fighting to accomplish victory but to apply by faith the victory that Christ has already won.

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The Target of Satan's Attack: the Mind

Nonetheless, Satan does not relent in his efforts to subdue us, and the primary target of his assault is our mind. He injects all manner of thoughts, proposals, questions, anxieties, and unbelief into our mind as "flaming darts" (Eph. 6:16) to weaken our resolve and lure us from the exercise of faith. Above all of these he injects doubts. This was his tactic to deceive Eve in the garden of Eden. Satan's first human victim was defeated by the serpent's inducement to question God's command and to doubt His motive for forbidding her to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "Did God really say, You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). The serpent went further to contradict with a lie God's warning concerning the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit: "You shall not surely die!" (Gen. 3:4). Moreover, he implanted into Eve the desire and ambition to be equal with God in knowledge and understanding: "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The devil's word acted as poison to turn Eve away from God and toward the nefarious desire that had been sown into her: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make oneself wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). Even before Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the devil had already captured her by causing her to doubt God. The evil one gained the ground in Eve because he gained an entry into her mind.

The devil has not changed his strategy, for the Lord says of him, "When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Nonetheless, believers throughout the centuries have repeatedly been deceived by the devil's ancient tactic, and he continues to shoot the fiery darts of doubt into believers' minds today. Faith, however, overcomes doubt. The Lord Himself often warned against doubt when teaching His disciples how to pray. In Matthew 21:21 He used His miracle of drying up the fig tree to instruct the disciples to have faith and not doubt: "Truly I say to you, If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, it will happen." Likewise, James admonishes us to pray in faith and to not doubt: "But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like the surge of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed about" (James 1:6). Knowing the power of our faith, the devil seeks to weaken it by injecting our mind with poison, and we must beware of his scheme.

It is imperative to recognize, therefore, that unwanted, intrusive thoughts that cause us to doubt God and lead us away from Him are not our own thoughts but those of the devil. If we open ourselves to his thoughts, he will torment us with them. He may even cause us to become obsessed with confessing those thoughts as if they were our own. If he gains this ground in us, he will surely cause us to lose our joy and vitality in Christ. But, Hallelujah, we have the way to defeat him!

The Shield of Faith and the Whole Armor of God

To neutralize these intrusions, we must take up the shield of faith, by which we "quench all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). We take up this shield by exercising faith in God, not in ourselves, our ability, or our strength. To exercise faith in this way is to apply the shield of faith as a defensive weapon against the enemy's flaming darts. Of course, it is wonderful to declare our faith in God in a general way, but we receive greater benefit by exercising our faith in Him in a more specific way, namely, by exercising our faith in His heart toward us, in the reliability of His word concerning us, and in the sovereignty manifested in His care for us.

We can take much comfort in the fact that the Lord's heart is always good toward us. The enemy may cause us to feel otherwise, but the Lord has no intention to damage us or to make us suffer unrighteously. We face many physical, psychological, and environmental hardships on the pathway of faith, and even though we may feel bewildered by them, we must firmly trust that God uses every situation to bring us into a deeper experience of Him and to facilitate our growth in His life unto maturity. We must also exercise faith in His Word. He has not spoken falsely concerning His eternal purpose or our participation in it. What He has spoken He will surely fulfill, and His word will not fail (Isa. 55:11). Satan may cause us to feel that God has abandoned us, but God's Word says that He will never forsake us (Deut. 31:8; Heb. 13:5). When the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that he was "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun in you a good work will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6), he offered us great assurance that God will indeed fulfill His good intention toward us. It is crucial also that we have faith in God's sovereignty. He never errs, and His arrangements in the lives of His people are always right and just. We are full of mistakes, but according to His sovereignty, He uses even our mistakes to accomplish His purpose with us. We surely do not desire to make mistakes, and He does not lead us into error, but we must believe that our mistakes are sovereignly allowed by Him. This does not mean, however, that we have a license to make mistakes and to blame those mistakes on Him. No, we must confess and repent of our mistakes, but we must not be ensnared by regret. If we regret our mistakes after we have confessed and repented of them, that is an indication that we lack faith in God's sovereignty and in the precious blood of Christ to wash us of our transgressions. To withstand the enemy's attacks against us, then, we must not allow him to shake our trust in God or to nullify our faith in His heart, His Word, and His sovereignty. To declare the divine facts that God's heart toward us is always good, that His Word is always true, and that He is sovereign over all our situations is to deprive Satan of his power to draw us away from our standing in faith.

To achieve maximum effect against the enemy's stratagems, it behooves us to take up the shield of faith from the moment we begin each new day. Often, we find that when we wake up in the morning, the enemy is already attempting to pollute our mind with temptations, doubts, and other thoughts that are contrary to God's heart toward us and His intention for us. At that time, we can take up the shield of faith by enjoying the Word of God through our reading and prayer. As we come to the Bible in this way upon rising in the morning, we set up our protection against the enemy's assault on our mind, and the fiery darts of the evil one are easily deflected. If we fail to contact the Lord and neglect to prayerfully read His Word early in the morning, then we begin our day without the protection of the shield of faith and are thus susceptible to the enemy's subtle suggestions and unprincipled leadings. But when we trust fully in God and exercise faith to substantiate through prayer the spiritual realities revealed

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in His Word, we enjoy the effectiveness of the shield of faith and are "guarded by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5), even when we are not conscious of the operation of that power.

The shield of faith, however, is not an isolated means of protection. Immediately preceding his mention of the shield of faith, Paul charges the Ephesians:

> Persistent faith manifests itself in persistent prayer, according to which the Lord executes His will, especially His will on behalf of His chosen ones.

"Take up the whole armor of God" and "stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:13-15). According to the way Paul orders the items of the whole armor of God, the shield of faith follows, or is the issue of, truth, righteousness, and peace, suggesting that we must live by these virtues to effectively apply the shield of faith. The sequence here is eminently logical. If we live according to truth, we are adorned with righteousness for our covering. When we are covered by righteousness, we enjoy inward peace. And when we enjoy peace, we are filled with faith. Viewed more intrinsically, Christ is truth (or, reality—John 14:6), righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), and peace (Eph. 2:14); therefore, to have a living of truth, righteousness, and peace that issues in the shield of faith, we must experience Christ as the objective, unseen reality of these virtues through the exercise of our subjective faith. If we fail to substantiate Christ as the reality of truth, righteousness, and peace, our faith will be weakened, and our attempts to apply the shield of faith out of our natural resources will be ineffective.

We must also "receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit" (Eph. 6:17-18). That we receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit by prayer implies that prayer is the secret to taking up all the items of the whole armor of God, which include not only the shield of faith but also "the breastplate of faith and love and a helmet, the hope of salvation" for the covering of our heart, our spirit, and our mind (1 Thes. 5:8). All our prayer must be "in spirit" because it is in our human spirit that Christ as the "life-giving Spirit" dwells (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16). Further, the faith by which we pray is not our natural ability to believe; it is "the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20), the pneumatic Christ who dwells in us as our believing ability. By praying according to the indwelling Christ as our ability to believe in and receive all the unseen spiritual realities, we apply the whole armor of God for our covering and for our fighting the spiritual warfare.

Some believers, however, make the mistake of living individualistically and seeking to overcome defeat apart from other members of the Body of Christ. But the whole armor of God is not upon individual members of the Body, just as the entirety of a soldier's armor is not upon an arm or a leg but upon the body corporately. The whole armor of God is upon the Body of Christ, the church as the corporate warrior engaged in spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-17), and like all unseen spiritual realities, the Body of Christ, whose essence is spiritual (Eph. 4:3-4), and the whole armor of God that is upon it must be substantiated by faith. Those who live only for their personal enjoyment of the Lord and not for the Body of Christ cannot experience the reality of the Body and thus pose no threat to Satan, who will not be crushed by individualistic believers but by the Body as a built-up, corporate entity (Rom. 16:20). If we live in isolation from other members of the Body or allow disagreements or offenses to keep us from fellowship with them, then we forfeit the protection of the whole armor of God that is upon the Body and expose ourselves to further attack. To be sure, Satan cannot prevail against the built-up church (Matt. 16:18), but he can easily prevail over individual members who stand apart from the church. Of course, we must not forsake our personal contact with the Lord, but even our personal contact with Him must be in the context of our being rightly related to the Body. Therefore, by the exercise of subjective faith in prayer and in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, we can apply and enjoy the protection of the whole armor of God that is upon the Body to withstand and overcome the enemy's incursions against us.

Persistent and Overcoming Faith

In its practical and subjective application, faith must also be persistent. Such faith requires the believers' cooperation through the exercise of their will in coordination with God's will and desire. In Luke 18:1-8

the Lord told His disciples a parable "to the end that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). He concluded by asking, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). In this parable He likens "His chosen ones" to an aggrieved widow and compares and contrasts God to "a certain judge in a certain city who did not fear God and did not regard man" (Luke 18:2-3, 7). This seemingly insensitive judge ultimately took up the cause of this widow because of her persistent petition for justice. The point here is that persistent faith manifests itself in persistent prayer, according to which the Lord executes His will, especially His will on behalf of His chosen ones. Unlike the hardhearted judge in this parable, God desires to fully and quickly avenge His chosen ones, and He will do so when the Son of Man comes. Until then, there is a need for our persistent faith, which is practically manifested in persistent prayer mingled with confident belief that our God has both the ability and desire to avenge us of our adversary, the devil, who is also God's enemy.

Our faith is also an overcoming faith. The writer of Hebrews reviews the many victories achieved by God's Old Testament saints through their faith: "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith overcame kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong in weakness, became mighty in war, routed the armies of foreigners" (Heb. 11:32-34). Moreover, many Old Testament saints endured the harshest treatments and the fiercest persecutions, some unto cruel and violent death (Heb. 11:35-38). The saints who thus lived and died by such overcoming faith are given the highest approbation: they are those "of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:38). If the Old Testament saints had the faith to conquer every obstacle and withstand the most savage torments unto victory, how much more the New Testament saints, who have the capacity to substantiate by faith and thus live out the very Christ who conquered sin, the world, death, and the devil himself? The faith of the New Testament saints is an overcoming faith because it is the faith of the unique Overcomer.

The Victorious Issue of Faith and Praise

Psalm 106:12 says, "They believed His words; / They sang His praise." Based on this verse, Watchman Nee provides some practical suggestions for learning to praise the Lord by faith. He first points out that "praise has a basic ingredient—faith" (*CWWN* 48:255). Praise and faith are interconnected. Genuine praise comes after we believe. However, if we do not praise, we will over time lose faith. Therefore, as soon as we have a small amount of faith, we should say, "O Lord! I praise You!" To praise the Lord requires us to open our mouth and utter "actual audible words of praise" (48:256). As we praise the Lord audibly, our faith will increase, Satan is put to flight, and we will be assured that the Lord has answered our prayer. Watchman Nee says further, "When you praise, Satan flees away. Sometimes we need to pray. But when our prayer reaches the point where we have faith and assurance, we know that the Lord has answered our prayer, and we should praise: 'Lord! I thank You! I praise You! This matter is already settled!'" (48:256). Nee continues, "Do not wait until the enemy runs away to sing. We have to sing to chase him away. We have to learn to praise by faith. When we praise Him in faith, the enemy will be defeated and driven away. We have to believe before we can praise. First we believe and praise, and then we will experience victory" (48:256).

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Acts 16 gives a stirring account of the power of faith and praise to release God's people from the darkest oppressions. After Paul and Silas cast out a spirit from a slave girl who had brought profit to her masters by divining, they were beaten with rods, having many stripes laid upon them, and were cast into prison (Acts 16:16-23). Already suffering from assault and incarceration, they were further restricted when the jailer put their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:24). In what appeared to be a hopeless and demoralizing situation, "Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and

the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). That Paul and Silas were praying indicates that their faith had not been shaken. Moreover, their praise to the Lord in song elicited the attention of the other prisoners, who must have found it shocking that their fellow detainees could be in such a transcendent state in the most trying and destitute of circumstances. Paul and Silas's songful praise testified of their joy in the midst of suffering and their spiritual freedom while in physical confinement. They were bound outwardly, but they were reigning inwardly over the entire situation. Eventually, even the jailer was subdued, and he and his household were saved and baptized (Acts 16:30-34). What kind of people can live the kind of life that was exhibited by Paul and Silas? It is only those who know the power of faith to overcome defeat and the power of praise to cause the enemy to flee.

By faith we have been brought into an organic union with Him, "the Author and Perfecter of our faith," and in this faith-union we have all that we need to overcome doubt, discouragement, unbelief, and every stratagem of the devil to lead us into hopelessness and despair.

We may engage in warfare through quiet prayer, but our praise unto victory can never be quiet. If Paul and Silas had only prayed quietly in that Philippian jail, the dark kingdom of Satan might not have been shaken, and the jailer and his family might not have been saved at that time. Likewise, it is through our audible praise, based on faith and issuing in further faith, that we enter spontaneously into the victory of Christ over Satan and all his efforts to subdue our joy. This praise is a well speaking—in essence, a praise with adoration—about God based on the revelation from His Word. To praise in this way requires that we exercise our faith to substantiate God, Christ, the accomplished work of redemption, and all the unseen spiritual realities. Our praise, then, is not an act of shouting to a God who is far away in the heavens but a joyous issue of our experience of the God who has been made real to us through our apprehension of and participation in the unseen spiritual realm. As we praise our God according to the spiritual realities that are testified in His Word and substantiated by our faith, we overcome defeat to live in the victory that Christ has already accomplished for us.

The main point here is that there is a recursive relationship between faith and praise that is enabled by proper prayer. Our prayer in faith activates the power to praise God for His victory. Simultaneously, our praise to God based on His victory reinforces and magnifies our grateful response in faith to His faithfulness.

Conclusion

As believers in Christ, we must learn to substantiate by faith all the unseen realities in the spiritual realm, including the victory of Christ over the devil, the world, and the attacks on our mind. We have no reason to fear defeat or to accept it any longer! On the contrary, we can rejoice in Christ's accomplished victory and experience it as a spiritual reality in our daily living. By faith we have been brought into an organic union with Him, "the Author and Perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), and in this faith-union we have all that we need to overcome doubt, discouragement, unbelief, and every stratagem of the devil to lead us into hopelessness and despair. Moreover, by grasping all the divine facts of God's accomplished work in Christ, we allow the Spirit to daily apply those accomplishments, including the effectiveness of Christ's death and the power of His resurrection, to our inner being. And as we take up the shield of faith and live in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, we spontaneously enjoy the protection of the whole armor of God that is upon the Body. Praise God that He has not left us without provision to live an overcoming life! Let us exercise faith to praise Him in all our situations, thereby frustrating the enemy's assaults on us and enabling us to live a life in the victory of faith.

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CONTENDING *for the* FAITH

BY LAYING HOLD ON THE ETERNAL LIFE

Martin H. Fuller • Kin Leong Seong

In Mark 6, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus compelled His disciples to get into a boat and sail toward Bethsaida. The Lord did not travel with them, however. Instead, He bid them farewell and went away to a mountain to pray. The disciples were thus left to make the voyage alone. Darkness fell, the wind began to blow against them, and rowing became increasingly difficult. In this hostile environment the disciples continued rowing long into the darkest part of the night, the fourth watch. They were distressed. Perhaps they wondered when the difficult journey would be over, perhaps they asked each other why the Lord had not accompanied them, or perhaps they doubted His wisdom in sending them on such a journey. But the Lord saw what the disciples were undergoing, and in that darkest part of the night, He came to them.

We believers are, so to speak, in the same boat. In one sense our Lord has gone away (through His ascension), and we are left here to make our appointed journey in faith. The darkness of this age intensifies, and contrary winds increase against us. Many things arise that challenge our faith: atheism and agnosticism gain ground in society, prominent Christians stumble and fall, the condition of our local church may be poor, or our personal environments may be tumultuous. Distressed by these challenges, we inevitably feel the urge to stop rowing. Yet our Lord has called us to follow Him, and He has promised to return to us. Even if stopping seems to grant us a respite, it might cause us to miss the Lord's appearing. Additionally, we are not alone on the journey; there are others in our boat to consider. Our perseverance, or lack thereof, can affect the believers around us. Consequently, we must continue. Considering all of this, how can we press on until we meet our Lord? The surprising answer: "Beloved,…earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3).

The believers to whom Jude wrote faced similarly tempestuous circumstances. Even before Jude's Epistle was written, Paul had already warned the believers that the faith of the gospel was under attack, necessitating a defense of and standing firm for it (Phil 1:7, 27). He alerted Timothy that "in the last days difficult times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1) and that "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13). Shortly after Paul's martyrdom Peter also warned the believers in his second Epistle of a deteriorating environment, one difficult and contrary to their journey. By the time Jude took up his pen to write to the believers, heretics were already in their midst, having "crept in unnoticed" (Jude 4), daring to participate in the very love feasts of the churches (Jude 12), with the goal of undermining the believers' faith. As discouraging as the situation was, Jude refused to give up the journey. Rejecting passivity, this "slave of Jesus Christ" (Jude 1) indicated the urgency of the situation with intensified language, "using all diligence to write" to "exhort" the believers to "earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Greek word underlying "to earnestly contend," ἐπαγωνίζομαι (*epagōnizomai*), is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It is composed of ἐπί (*epi*) and ἀγωνίζομαι (*agōnizomai*), with the prepositional prefix ἐπί functioning as an intensifier. The word ἀγωνίζομαι, etymologically related to our English word *agonize*, generally means "to fight, struggle" (Bauer et al. s.v. "ἀγωνίζομαι"). Although Jude could have simply used ἀγωνίζομαι, a word already giving the sense of exertion, he recognized that the environment required more intensity. Hence, Jude employed ἐπαγωνίζομαι, meaning "to exert intense effort on behalf of something" (Bauer et al. s.v. "ἐπαγωνίζομαι"). Thus, Jude urged the believers not only to fight but also to fight in earnest, to fight with heightened purpose and seriousness. And surely the Lord's call through Jude is for us as well. Our circumstances, often disheartening and discouraging on multiple fronts, are challenging to our faith, just as they undoubtedly were for the believers of Jude's day. Yet we "unto whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11) must not respond with resignation or passivity. Truly, "the night is far

advanced" (Rom. 13:12), but the day of our Lord's return is closer than ever before, and our fellow believers need encouragement. We must press on and earnestly contend for the faith.

Contending Earnestly for the Faith

Before we identify two ways of contending earnestly for the faith, we must first see what we contend for and what we do not. In Jude 3 the believers are charged to contend for the objective faith, namely, the things in which we believe. The objective faith is "the common faith" (Titus 1:4), "once for all delivered to the saints" for "our common salvation" (Jude 3). Notably, believers are not exhorted to contend for numerous issues over which Christians tragically wrangle today. Believers are not charged to contend with one another over particular political or social causes. Neither are we urged to struggle over church practices. Taking into consideration our appointed and difficult journey, squabbling over such issues hardly strengthens our faith. More likely, our "progress and joy of the faith" (Phil. 1:25) will be hampered. Even more, believers should not fight over ancillary teachings. Some teachings are primary and necessary, but many others, even though rooted in the Scriptures, are only tangentially related to salvation and of lesser import. Arguing over doctrines of this sort only makes the believers' journey more difficult, causing them to be "tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14). We are charged to contend for the faith common to the believers for salvation. We are not charged to fight earnestly for anything else.

How, then, do we contend for the faith? In an outward way the believers should be ready and willing to fight for and defend the faith openly against any opposition. The New Testament furnishes us with numerous examples of such contending. The apostle Paul repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to strive for the faith. In Acts 15 certain men came to the church in Antioch and began teaching the Gentile believers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Paul contended with these men openly, ultimately taking his concerns to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, the epicenter of the problem (Acts 15:2). That Paul would make the journey and contend for the faith in Jerusalem—with believing Pharisees and in the presence of the apostles and elders—says much about Paul's earnestness for the faith (Acts 15:3-5). Later, Paul was willing even to oppose the apostle Peter to his face for the sake of the faith (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul was a former persecutor of and a relative latecomer to the faith, whereas Peter had been with Jesus from the beginning and had taken the lead among the apostles in the initial raising up of the churches. Nonetheless, for the sake of the faith, Paul refused to remain silent. Paul fought for the faith, and he charged the believers to do the same. He urged the Philippians to "stand firm…striving together along with the faith of the gospel," not "being frightened by the opposers" in their environment (Phil. 1:27-28). While some of these opposers may have been unbelievers, others were Christians preaching and announcing Christ with the intention of causing Paul affliction (Phil. 1:15, 17). That Christians could have such a malicious motive in preaching the gospel is almost inconceivable, yet Paul was undeterred. He was willing to undergo opposition, afflictions, and bonds to defend the faith of the gospel publicly while simultaneously appealing to all believers to join him in his defense of the faith. The apostle John too strove for the faith at the close of the apostolic age, counseling the believers to rise up and fight. Decades after Paul's martyrdom, John reported that "many deceivers went out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh," a clear affront to the faith (2 John 7). Should such a deceiver visit a believer's home, John charged the believers not to receive him: "Do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, Rejoice!" (2 John 10). And this charge was not addressed to John's fellow apostles and elders. It was addressed to "the chosen lady and to her children" (2 John 1). Contending for the faith is certainly the responsibility of God's workers and the elders of a local church; but it is also the responsibility and privilege of a believing mother and her believing children. Even a believing mother can and should boldly proclaim to someone who has come to her door, challenging Christ's deity, that Jesus is God come in the flesh. All believers of every age and stage are qualified to strive and struggle for the faith. The need for such contending has hardly diminished. Many heretical teachings that are contrary to the faith are being stealthily introduced among the believers, and other false teachings are even being taught openly, sometimes by the very ones whose responsibility it is to strengthen the believers' faith. In the last days of this age, which are fraught with intense opposition to our belief, we must earnestly contend for the faith.

Contending for the Faith Inwardly

As important as it is to contend openly for the faith, our outward contending requires a prior inward contending for the faith. Jude seems to have this in mind when

he writes in verses 20 and 21: "But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This charge immediately follows the severe warnings regarding heretics in the preceding verses. In the face of these dangerous, invasive mockers, Jude calls on the believers to inwardly build up themselves upon the foundation of their faith. Strikingly, the faith in verse 20 refers primarily to the objective faith, as suggested by the use in Greek of the definite article preceding the noun. Jude calls this objective faith "your most holy faith." Through the believers' increased apprehending, the objective faith in Jude 3 became *their* faith in Jude 20. Rather than being a mere set of doctrines, the faith became (to some degree) personal to the believers to whom Jude wrote. Undoubtedly, such faith constitutes an effective bulwark against infiltrating heresies. Upon this most holy faith, the believers build up themselves inwardly by "praying in the Holy Spirit." While there are certainly many matters that require our prayer, the context here suggests that in an environment of opposition we should contend for the faith in an inward way by praying in the Holy Spirit regarding the faith, asking God to reveal the faith to us so that it would become increasingly *our* faith. For example, one aspect of our faith is that Jesus Christ is Lord. As we contend inwardly for this aspect through prayer, we may find ourselves not only saying that Christ Jesus is *the* Lord but also, like Paul, declaring, "Christ Jesus *my* Lord" (Phil. 3:8; emphasis added). Christ's death on the cross is another aspect of our faith. Through prayer this fact can become deeply personal so that we too can say, as Paul did, that the Son of God "loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*" (Gal. 2:20; emphasis added).

This inward contending is also found in 1 Peter. Peter's audience—like Jude's—faced difficult circumstances. In spite of these, Peter assured the believers at the beginning of his first Epistle that they were "being guarded by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5). Here God's great power, with its ability to guard, becomes effective by means of faith. Peter thus helped the believers to realize that the "various trials" that made them sorrowful were actually a proving of their faith (1 Pet. 1:6-7). In this context, Peter charges the believers, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being always ready for a defense to everyone who asks of you an account concerning the hope which is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Here Peter connects the inward sanctification of Christ as Lord with the outward defense of the faith. The believers' inward contending for the faith by sanctifying Christ as Lord in their hearts consequently prepares, enables, and strengthens them for an outward contending with anyone and at any time. Both Peter and Jude call the believers to such inward contending, and to this we also must give ourselves. If we are faithful to earnestly contend for the faith in our own hearts, then when someone rises up to mock or distort the faith in our presence, something within our being will rise up in response. This is because the object of attack is not merely *the faith* as an objective list of doctrines but rather *our faith* as a subjective inward reality.

The apostles charge the believers not only to contend for the faith but also to hold it (1 Tim. 3:9). Because of "false teachers" bringing in "destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1) and heretics misaiming regarding the truth in order to "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18),

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believers must endeavor to hold on to the faith. And just as contending has an interior side, so too does holding, for Paul connects holding faith to the conscience: Timothy is charged to "war the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:18-19). Deacons must be those "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9). Paul's linking of faith and conscience indicates that our conscience has some bearing on our faith. Failure to attend to our conscience in our dealings with God and with others can have dire consequences, for in thrusting away the care of the conscience, many "have become shipwrecked regarding the faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). In fact, believers struggling with their faith may find that their doubts and confusion stem less from exterior challenges to the faith and more from neglect of their conscience. With the specter of

shipwreck before us, we must be vigilant and aggressive to care for our conscience for the sake of the faith. On this voyage appointed by the Lord, we are beset by contrary winds, turbulent waves, and distress. The last thing we need is to undermine our own journey by thrusting away a good conscience and becoming shipwrecked regarding the faith before the Lord meets us on the way.

Contending for the Faith by Laying Hold on the Eternal Life

Perhaps the most profound thought in the New Testament concerning our contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints is revealed in 1 Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses." Here, at the conclusion of his first Epistle to Timothy, Paul charges his co-worker and "genuine child in faith" (1 Tim. 1:2) to fight the good fight of the faith by laying hold on the eternal life, to which Timothy and all believers are called. At first glance the exhortations to "fight the good fight of the faith" and to "lay hold on the eternal life" might seem to be two discrete and unrelated imperatives. However, a closer examination reveals a strong connection between the two. Unlike in the preceding verse, where Paul separates the imperatives "flee" and "pursue" with a conjunction, verse 12 presents the imperatives "fight" and "lay hold on" in apposition, without any intervening conjunction, suggesting a close relationship between these two commands. Furthermore, the Greek word underlying *lay hold on* (ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, *epilambanomai*) can also have a sense of struggle or combat. The word means to "take hold of, grasp, catch, sometimes with violence" (Bauer et al. s.v. "ἐπιλαμβάνομαι"), reinforcing the connection to fighting. Paul's thought here seems to be that just as Timothy confessed the good confession of the faith, confessing to the eternal life, at some point in his past, so he must now fight the good fight of the faith by laying hold on that same eternal life. That the eternal life needs our laying hold suggests that our experience of the eternal life requires deliberate and even aggressive action and is not a spontaneous result of our mere possession of it. In the midst of the church's degradation and the grave threats and opposition to the faith, Paul exhorts Timothy to seize the eternal life and closely connects this to Timothy's fighting the good fight of the faith.

While some may view laying hold on the eternal life primarily in terms of a future reward for the believers, the New Testament presents a richer understanding. Although eternal life certainly includes this future aspect, it is also a reality for the believers to experience today. All believers are regenerated, reborn, with the divine, eternal life at the moment when they first believe into and receive the Son, who is the eternal life (1 Pet. 1:3; John 3:16; 11:25). And following regeneration, believers should grow in this life until they reach maturity (Col. 1:28). In this light, to "lay hold on the eternal life" should not be taken only as a command related to a future prize. It is even more an exhortation to actively grasp and experience the eternal life in the present, to grow in the divine life unto maturity, and in doing so, to fight the good fight of the faith in an intrinsic way. Just as Paul commanded Timothy to flee, pursue, and fight with the expectation that Timothy would do so continually throughout his Christian life, Paul also expected him to repeatedly lay hold on the eternal life.

This divine, eternal life is repeatedly and specifically emphasized in Paul's latter Epistles (1 Tim. 1:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7) as the inoculation against the declining spiritual condition of the church and the distracting oppositions to the faith so that believers would "live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12). Paul's appeal to lay hold on the eternal life exposed the waning spiritual condition of the church that caused it to be bereft of both the experience and manifestation of the divine life and thereby susceptible to deviations from the faith. In the time since Paul wrote his latter Epistles, the situation has hardly improved. The spiritual condition of the church has continued to decline, the faith is still opposed, and there are still deviations from the faith. But rather than becoming discouraged by this situation, believers should be all the more aggressive to lay hold on the eternal life, living by the divine life to fight the good fight of the faith regardless of the situation or environment.

When Christ was on the earth, He too fought the good fight of the faith against the Pharisees and Sadducees, not only by His teaching but also by manifesting the divine life of His Father in His human living. He lived not by His human life, though it was perfect and sinless (Heb. 4:15), but by His Father's life (John 6:57), setting a pattern for His believers. Just as Christ Himself lived His daily human life and carried out His earthly ministry by the Father's life and thereby manifested the divine reality to all of those around Him, so also those of the faith ought to live and serve by laying hold on the eternal life. The eternal life, the life of God, should be the source, supply, and strength of all that the believers do in the totality of their Christian living and work, and this, in essence, is their intrinsic contending for the faith.

How, then, do we lay hold on the eternal life and thereby contend for the faith? Jude 20 and 21 provide two helpful practical applications: "You, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." At the beginning of Jude, the believers are charged to "contend for the faith" (Jude 3); here at the end of the book they are instructed how to contend. First, we must build up ourselves upon our most holy faith. As we have mentioned before, *faith* in Jude 20 refers to the objective faith, which is the truth contained and revealed in the Bible. To build up ourselves upon this most holy faith is to come to the full knowledge of the truth as a deterrent to the declining state of the church resulting from distorted truths and outright heresies. Jude was not the only New Testament author to emphasize this point. Paul, in his Epistles to Timothy and Titus, also repeatedly stresses the believers' need to come to the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). In 1 Timothy 2:4 he pointedly states that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth." The full knowledge of the truth is the thorough and complete realization of the reality revealed in God's Word. To contend for the faith, uphold the truth, and stem the tide of heretical, unhealthy, and misaimed teachings that overthrow faith, we must be absolute for and come to the full knowledge of the divine truth. Paul thus instructs his young co-worker to inoculate against the gangrenous spread of the decline by "cutting straight the word of the truth," that is, presenting God's word correctly and precisely as a carpenter would accurately cut wood (2 Tim. 2:15). And Paul considers this fight for the truth to be the responsibility of all the believers, for the church is not only "the house of God" but also "the pillar and base of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The church as the house of God is called not only to be God's living family but also to be the support, testimony, and upholding base of the divine reality of the truth. The church can be such a support and base of the truth only if the contents of the objective faith become the subjective experience and reality of the believers by their coming to the full knowledge of the truth.

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The second practical application of how we may lay hold on the eternal life and thereby fight the good fight of the faith is prayer. Immediately after "building up yourselves upon your most holy faith," Jude mentions "praying in the Holy Spirit" so that the believers might "keep [themselves] in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21). As we pray in the Holy Spirit, we keep ourselves in the love of God, and we also await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, our prayer in the Holy Spirit ushers us into the fellowship of the Triune God. The result of such fellowship is our enjoyment of the divine life, expressed in the phrase *unto eternal life*. Thus, to practically lay hold on the eternal life is to continually live by and in the Triune God. Such a living in and with the Triune God is our intrinsic way to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and to fight the good fight of the faith (1 Tim. 6:12).

It is noteworthy that Paul summarizes his ministry with three short statements, beginning with "I have fought the good fight" and ending with "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). The apostle Paul fought the good fight and kept the faith because in the course of his Christian life and service, he laid hold on the eternal life. May the Lord have mercy on us that we would be those who follow the pattern of the faithful apostles to contend for the faith by laying hold on the eternal life throughout the course of our Christian life and church life. In the face of opposition to our faith, we must rise up to earnestly contend both outwardly and inwardly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. And we must fight the good fight of the faith by laying hold on the eternal life.

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UNBELIEF

The editors

Faith is indeed a very great thing and precious not only to God but also to those who believe. In reviewing the preceding articles, we are in awe at God's wisdom to make faith the characteristic of His New Testament economy. Our hearts genuinely overflow in praise to Him that He has made the way of faith, both objective and subjective, the way for the ultimate accomplishment of the great mystery of His will. And it is our faith that causes us to praise Him, because faith always points us to who He is and what He does and not to what we are and what we do.

Retrospective and Further Reflection on Faith

In a way of retrospection and even further reflection, we should say here that faith is not merely the ability to believe in who God is and what He has done; more intrinsically it is a God-infused function to lay hold of the reality of who God is and what He is doing in His economy to carry out His will. Faith is a genuine substantiating of the things that we hope for, the actual grasping inwardly of the things that we hear about in the proclamation of God's Word. As such, faith, in this subjective sense, does not lay hold of mere doctrines or teachings; rather, it makes real within the believers all that God has planned in Christ for the accomplishment of the good pleasure of His will. Thus, faith brings the believers into an organic union with the Christ of God's economy and makes Christ and God's economy their inward reality and experience. The content of that economy, which is focused on Christ and carried out in Christ, is "the faith" in the objective sense. Thus, the objective faith is not simply a set of teachings or doctrines that we must believe in order to be saved, even though, viewed independently, it may be said to be so. More intrinsically, the objective faith is coequal with the full process of God's economy in Christ for the fulfillment of His will *as it is substantiated by the subjective faith* infused into His believers. Of course, the full process of God's economy is objectively and independently real and does not rely on subjective faith to be real in itself; but to be the objective faith that saves, God's economy must be that which is made real by faith infused into the believers through the hearing of God's Word. What subjective faith substantiates is objective faith, not the varied and divisive plethora of secondary Christian teachings, regardless of how proper, correct, and biblical they are. The objective faith, as the contents of God's economy in Christ, concerns Christ's person and work for the complete salvation of human beings in the fullest sense of that salvation, that is, not simply salvation from sin and perdition but salvation unto glorifying God eternally. To be brought into that salvation fully, human beings must experience subjective faith inwardly substantiating the following: Christ as God incarnate, His death for their redemption, His resurrection for their regeneration, His ascension as Lord of all and Head of His Body, His return to the believers as the Spirit who resides within them and makes the Triune God real to them inwardly, and His constituting them in the church to be the very members of His Body today and to be His bride for His return. Ultimately, through His person and work, Christ will glorify God through the Spirit in His believers and build them up to be His corporate expression for eternity, that is, the New Jerusalem. The items of this objective faith, substantiated by the subjective faith infused into the believers through the hearing of God's Word, are not merely the map, nor merely the signposts, but the journey itself for the proper Christian walk and genuine church life. This objective faith is the apostles' teaching as the word of the Bible, and it is not only what we believe but more importantly what we grasp subjectively as reality through faith. Indeed, as the apostle says, "God's economy…is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4)!

We may think that the experience of faith concerns mainly our initial salvation. But every believer

can attest to the continual struggle that he or she faces concerning faith. The Christian life is a life of faith, not just to believe what God is doing to accomplish His great will but also to apprehend and enter into that ongoing accomplishment. Paul reminds the believers that their Christian life begins with faith: "This only I wish to learn from you, Did you receive the Spirit out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:2). But he goes on to point out that faith characterizes the ongoing experience of our Christian life: "He therefore who bountifully supplies to you the Spirit and does works of power among you, does He do it out of the works of law or out of the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:5). We did not believe in Christ and receive the Spirit in our regeneration through any work that we had done but only through the infusing of faith by the hearing of God's Word. Likewise, God continues to supply, and to supply bountifully, the Spirit to the believers through the same operation—the infusing of faith by the hearing of God's Word. Even as you read these words, we hope that God is doing this very thing within you based on His words from the apostles' teaching, that He is infusing more faith into you through your "hearing." Elsewhere in the same Epistle Paul sums up his whole Christian life in terms of faith: "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). What an encouragement this is! We all live in the flesh, the flesh that troubles us so much and drags us down so often. Yet following Paul's example, we can avert our attention from the flesh and live in faith, trusting in what the Son of God has done and is doing to fully save us. This faith not only trusts but, through our trust, also substantiates the Son of God within us and enables us to live according to His indwelling. But beyond these places in the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul and the other apostles constantly remind the believers to exercise their faith in all matters related to their Christian and church life. The intrinsic matters of our Christian and church life are matters that are not seen and thus require faith for their substantiation. The only way to run that race which is our Christian life is to look away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2), again not just faith as a beginning but also faith as an ongoing experience for us to be brought on to perfection. In the church we are to "arrive at the oneness of the faith," where faith is not just the initial apprehension of God's economy but more completely "the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Paul the apostle, even to the end of his life and even while in the limited circumstances of his Roman imprisonment, viewed his ministry as "a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith" (Phil. 2:17), that is, as a priestly service to offer as a sacrifice to God the faith of the believers in its most comprehensive sense. Like the apostles, we should live and serve fully in the realm of faith, not in the realm of what is before our eyes and often so discouraging but in the unseen realm of what we hope for and what faith substantiates within us.

The struggle related to faith that we believers continually face is a struggle between what is seen in our situation in this world and what is unseen in the divine and mystical realm of God's will. But this struggle has a practical and comforting solution. The apostle John tells the believers that "this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). The subjective faith infused into us through the hearing of God's Word, because it genuinely substantiates all the items of the objective faith, gives us the boldness and even the conviction to stand victoriously for what is unseen, in contradiction to what is seen. For this reason, the apostle Paul speaks of faith as a shield that extinguishes every temptation, doubt, question, lie, and inner attack from God's enemy (Eph. 6:16). Thus, subjective faith is not only a substantiation and not only a conviction; it is also the source of our victory. While we do not ask for the struggle related to the faith, we welcome it if only to give our subjective faith the avenue to make us victorious in the faith. This is the testimony of faith, that it makes God's people overcomers, as is so well attested in Hebrews 11: "Who through faith overcame" (Heb. 11:33)! An excellent example of the

> Faith, in its subjective sense, does not lay hold of mere doctrines or teachings; rather, it makes real within the believers all that God has planned in Christ for the accomplishment of the good pleasure of His will.

victory of faith in real-time action is unfolded before our eyes in Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians 15. In this long chapter Paul addresses his serious concern: "How is it that some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12). Such a denial strikes at the very heart of the Christian faith because in order to fulfill God's economy, Christ Himself must be the first to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:4, 12, 15, 20), and in being raised, He as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" must also raise from the dead those who believe (1 Cor. 15:20, 22-23, 52) and bring them into eternal life. If this is not true, then, Paul contends, our subjective faith is not substantiating anything real, not convicting us of anything unseen; our ("your") faith, then, is vain and futile (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). In saying that our faith is vain, Paul uses the Greek adjective κενός (*kenos*), meaning 'empty' or 'without content', that is, without any substance; and in saying that our faith is futile, he uses the Greek adjective μάταιος (*mataios*), meaning 'idle' or 'useless', that is, without having any convicting effect. But Paul vehemently protests against the nonsense of saying that there is no resurrection of Christ and His believers from the dead: "I protest by the boasting in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). His faith indeed substantiated the resurrection within him because every day he died with Christ inwardly in his apostolic work, and he saw the fruit of his dying coming up in resurrection in the Corinthian believers (cf. 2 Cor. 4:12). Indeed, he boasts in them as evidence of the resurrection of the dead. But beyond conviction and beyond even boasting, Paul enters into the victory of faith at the end of this chapter, and it is a victory of soaring transcendence: "Then the word which is written will come to pass, 'Death has been swallowed up unto victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55). Paul received the word of the gospel, and this infused faith into him to substantiate the realities of God's economy in Christ. His faith was not vain or futile; it was substantive and full of conviction, and he experienced it in reality in his work among the believers. So infused by substantiating faith was he that he was able to taunt death itself, the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), and triumph over it right then and there in his writing. It stands as a testimony of the victory of faith to us all, and he knew it: "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:57-58). Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for the victory of our faith!

> The struggle related to faith that we believers continually face is a struggle between what is seen in our situation in this world and what is unseen in the divine and mystical realm of God's will. But this struggle has a practical and comforting solution. The apostle John tells the believers that "this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith."

But while our subjective faith shields us from all assaults on the truth of God's economy in Christ and gives us victory in these continual struggles concerning the faith, the objective faith itself, according to the apostles' teaching, needs our struggle for it, our defense and even contention for it. Paul exhorts the Philippians to "stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together along with the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). Here he uses a Greek verb for striving that refers to contending in a vigorous way and that personifies the faith as a contestant who has the believers as co-contestants. Paul himself was in that same co-struggle for and along with the faith, being at that time imprisoned for his contest for the faith. Near the end of his life and again confined in prison, he charges his younger co-worker Timothy to "suffer evil with the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:8), and again he uses a Greek verb that personifies the gospel (i.e., the object of faith and the contents of the faith) as a sufferer who has fellow sufferers. Paul himself was foremost in this co-suffering at that time, not only because of his imprisonment but even more painfully because many in the churches were now ashamed of him for being a prisoner and had turned away from him (2 Tim. 1:8, 15). Paul was

more than an apostle who enjoyed and even boasted in the victory that faith gave to him; he was a contestant for that faith, suffering along with it the same evils it suffered in its going forth into the world. And he expected that the believers would participate in this same struggle along with the faith and along with him. To the Philippians he declared: "In my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace" (Phil. 1:7). Jude likewise exhorts the believers concerning this same struggle for the faith: "I found it necessary to write to you and exhort you to earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Jude is writing at the beginning of the church's decline, and certainly his exhortation has in view the heretical apostates and their teachings, both of which were creeping into the church. But his exhortation to contend for the faith, within the context of his Epistle in its entirety, does not easily evoke images of Catholic heretic trials and Protestant doctrinal disputations; later history provides those images for us, it seems. Rather, Jude first reminds the believers of negative historical examples in order to expose those who now mocked the faith and made divisions in the church (Jude 5-19). Then, he exhorts the believers to inwardly and spiritually take care of the faith themselves: "But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21). While we, after millennia of heresies and apostasies, may understand contending for the faith in an outward and perhaps argumentative way, Jude's exhortation is not to take up rhetorical arms against heretics but to build up ourselves upon our most holy faith. The exhortation is not directed at the heretics. It is directed at us the believers, and thus, our contending for the faith should be first and foremost within ourselves, those to whom the faith concerning our common salvation has been delivered once for all. There were then and there are now heretical apostates, murmurers, complainers, and mockers, who even dare to enter in among us and try to infect our faith. It is their will to sow unbelief into our hearts, and they will always be among us. But the only true repellent is our own inward contending for the faith, which is ultimately our own responsibility and duty to the faith.

Our intention in this issue is to show how great a matter faith is not just for the beginning of our Christian life but more crucially for its continuation and final completion. For us now in this age, the faith that has been delivered to us is the full compass of our complete salvation, and the faith that has been infused into us enables us to apprehend gradually and experientially our complete salvation. Faith is both the capital and the currency of our salvation in God's economy. Thus, it is an extremely valuable and precious commodity and one not to be lightly discounted. This is the apostle Peter's sentiment when he addresses his second Epistle to "those who have been allotted faith equally precious as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1). Peter is writing to the Jewish believers throughout the Gentile lands, but contrary to their former characterization as people of the law, he refers to them as "those who have been allotted faith." And more strikingly Peter speaks of this faith as "equally precious as ours," referring first to himself and then probably to all other Jewish believers. But it is easy to imagine that Peter also has in mind all believers throughout the earth at that time, taking *ours* in the most comprehensive way because, no doubt, he was very mindful of the fact that the nations had been introduced into the faith through his own service in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). The Jews and the nations have both been brought under the economy of faith in one Body (Eph. 2:13-18), and in writing his second Epistle, Peter gives immediate prominence to the preciousness of this faith. Further, he tells his readers that they "have been allotted" this faith, using a Greek verb that elsewhere in the New Testament refers to the physical casting of lots (Luke 1:9; John 19:24; Acts 1:17). Of course, here the verb is used metaphorically, and many scholars have noticed that the connotation here is that faith was procured not by anyone's own effort; faith just "fell" to those to whom God had allotted it,

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just as the Old Testament practice of casting lots relied on trust in God's sovereignty to determine the outcome and not on human choice. The verb is also reminiscent of the allotting of the portions of the good land to the tribes of Israel (Josh. 13:6; 14:1-5; 19:51). We can expect that these allusions were not lost on Peter's Jewish readers, and thus, in his few words Peter was able to make faith as gratuitous and as precious to them as the very land that God had given them in His former economy. Faith is nothing that we work for; faith is just given to us by God as a free gift. Paul says as much to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). The Greek word for *this* clearly refers back to the whole clause *by grace you have been saved through faith*, and the whole clause itself is a statement of the free gift of God in salvation. Salvation is the gift of God, and the grace by which we are saved is itself a free gift, as grace always is (Rom. 5:15; Eph. 3:7; cf. Rom. 4:4; 11:6), and thus, the faith through which God freely saves by His grace freely given must also itself be a free gift. But the fact that faith is free does not make faith cheap. Faith is most precious to God and to the apostles, and it should be equally precious to us. Even when faith is under trial and duress, as it is not just for the martyr but for us the everyday saint, it shows its approvedness and value as greater than that of gold, as Peter says in another place (1 Pet. 1:7). From every perspective and in every way, we should consider faith as a most prized possession, and we should guard it with utmost care.

The Insult of Unbelief

As great as faith is positively in God's economy, unbelief is, correspondingly, as great negatively. While most people (and many Christians) think that God saves human beings based on what they do, the New Testament clearly teaches otherwise: "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). God saves people not because of what they do but because they believe in what He has done: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life" (John 3:16; cf. John 3:36). This is the exclusiveness of the Christian gospel, which preserves God's own will in salvation (John 6:40). All human beings are born into sin and are constituted sinners before God regardless of their actions, though their actions eventually attest to their sinfulness. Thus, all human beings are already condemned even before they act in any way. The apostle Paul's words in Romans 5:15-19 make this very clear. Hence, human actions do not save, contrary to what any human ethical system may teach. This may seem harsh and hard to swallow. But the good news is that God in His great mercy has made definite provisions for salvation, which satisfy His righteousness, protect His holiness, and insure His glory: He sent His only Begotten to die for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2; John 1:29; 3:17). But one must believe in what God has done if he or she is to receive salvation. Faith alone frees an unbeliever from eternal condemnation and makes him or her someone who accepts and receives what God has done for salvation. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name" (John 1:12). To stay in unbelief in the face of this good and merciful news is not merely a personal predilection without consequence; it is a serious decision in favor of eternal condemnation. We find Watchman Nee's urging through his preaching of the gospel so very compelling on this point:

> Dear readers, I do not know who you would rather see die. Would you rather bear all your sins and die, or would you believe in and rely on Jesus, the Lamb of God, and let Him die for you? Either you die or He dies for you; it is either one or the other! If the Lord Jesus does not die for you, then you must die. Who will die? Thank and praise God because "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). You do not have to die; you do not have to perish for your sins. From this point on, you will not perish because you are a sinner, but because you have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18). Therefore, do not let the Lord Jesus say to you, "You *are not willing* to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40). (*CWWN* 6:695)

Is God being capricious in requiring faith for salvation? Is He imposing on human beings some random test of obedience simply to have His say-so over His creatures? Absolutely not! As His creatures, we were made to express and glorify Him alone, not ourselves or even any of His other creatures. And certainly we should not be contaminated by sin, dominated by death, and left to eternal condemnation. He certainly did not create us for this, and to acknowledge His true intention and hold to it is to honor Him for being who He really is. To acknowledge and, more importantly, to receive His provisions for our salvation from all the things that hold us back from fulfilling the very purpose of our creation is to give Him the way to carry out the good of His will toward us. To turn away from His good will by rejecting His provisions for our salvation

is to spurn Him and insult Him deeply. Of course, He will not impose His salvation on anyone who is unwilling. "Let him who wills take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). God bears the insult and allows every insulting person to reject His offer and stay in eternal condemnation. This is righteous and fair and above fault. Thus, unbelief, being far more than a passive indifference to God, is, in fact, a great affront to the kindness and mercy and forgiveness of God; it is the ultimate insult to who He is.

All we who believe in Christ know these things and can rejoice that we have received faith. But we should never think that, having received faith, we are immune to the failure and insult of unbelief. The New Testament—in fact, the whole Bible, as we have seen in the articles in this issue—speaks of faith not just as the basic need of all the unbelieving but even more as the constant need of all God's people. Unbelief does not ever cease to be an insult to God, even if it is, ironically, His believers who shrink back into it or even give the slightest sway to it. He is no respecter of persons, and the believer who chooses unbelief is as insulting to Him as the unbeliever who has not received faith at all. Not to believe in who He is and what He does is fundamentally insulting to Him in both the unbeliever and the believer. Indeed, since faith is ultimately a gift from God (Eph. 2:8), does not the believer, who has received this mercy from God, give greater cause for insult to God when he or she willfully chooses unbelief instead of the faith that has been gifted? Of course, we steadfastly maintain that this gracious gift of God is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29) and that He will never withdraw the gift of faith completely from His believers, but that does not mean that He is always happy with them, especially when they choose to spurn the gift and its Giver and to willfully take the way of unbelief instead.

The Prototype of Unbelief

On this point the Bible is very stern and uses a single incident in the Old Testament as a recurring reminder about the seriousness of unbelief. The incident is Israel's not believing in God in Numbers 13—14, and it is brought back to the memory of God's people numerous times throughout the Bible: in Numbers 26:65 and 32:8-13; in Deuteronomy 1:19-46; 2:14-15; and 9:23; in Psalm 95:11 and Psalm 106:24-26; in Ezekiel 20:15; then, in 1 Corinthians 10:5; and finally, in Hebrews 3:7—4:13. We ourselves do well now to remember and consider this incident with its significant background and the warnings given in some of these reminders.

When God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush in order to send Moses to the children of Israel, He made clear what He intended to do for His people: "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exo. 3:8). This land was His promise, and His intention was to personally come down and deliver the Israelites from Egypt into this land. But from this very first mention of the promised land, God did not hide the fact that there would be obstacles, for He continued in the same breath by saying: "…to the place

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of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites" (Exo. 3:8). It was a land flowing not just with milk and honey but also with oppositions and implied battles. But He said: "I have come down…to bring them" to that land. In point of fact, this was not merely a promise of some future act but a declaration of a commencing action. Thus, it was as true as He Himself is, and so He began to do it, giving them the revelation of His law (Exo. 19—23), enacting His covenant with them (Exo. 24), leading them to build the tabernacle for His personal presence among them (Exo. 25—40), delivering the arrangements for His offerings and His feasts with them (Lev. 1—27), and forming them into His army to take the land that He was giving them and setting out with them toward that land (Num. 1—10).

All this He did, as He said that He was coming down to do, in the space of merely a year and fifty days after Israel's exodus from Egypt (Num. 10:11). But sadly, we read the history that immediately ensued, as His people were, by His great doing, all set to enter into that land: murmuring evil before God (Num. 11:1-3), lusting after the forsaken and fleshly enjoyments of Egypt (Num. 11:4-35), slandering God's appointed

spokesman (Num. 12), and eventually not believing in God Himself (Num. 13:1—14:38). This final failure is the incident that later books of the Bible will remind us about repeatedly. It took place within only a few months of their setting out toward the good land, around the fifth month of that second year (cf. Num. 13:20), while Israel encamped at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran (Num. 12:16; 13:26). Twelve men, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, were sent out to spy out the good land and see what it was like. They returned forty days later with their report, which was mixed. Most said:

> We came to the land into which you sent us; and it indeed flows with milk and honey…However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large…The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negev, and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites dwell in the hill country, and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the Jordan. (Num. 13:27-19)

In spite of what God was actually doing in their plain sight, the children of Israel chose not to believe in God but to consider only what they were able to do in themselves. This was indeed a despising of who He is.

This much was in line with what God had intimated to Moses in Exodus 3:8, when He made known, before the exodus, what He was going to do. But the further words in the report were not in line with God's intention: "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we…The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up its inhabitants." Thus, most of the spies brought to the children of Israel an evil report of that good land, which God, up until that point, had been bringing them into. But Caleb, one of the spies, tried to quiet the people and encourage them to possess what God was giving them: "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Nevertheless, the evil report had taken root in the hearts of the children of Israel, and they lost heart for what God was providing and pitifully wept for themselves in the night. The next day they rose up and murmured against Moses and Aaron, questioned God's good heart toward them, and intended to return to Egypt. Joshua and Caleb, the only two spies who stood with God's intention and present doing, again tried to encourage the people to let God do what He intended for them: "If Jehovah is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey." They fully trusted in what the Lord was doing. But the whole assembly was ready to stone them on the spot (Num. 13:1—14:10).

This was the culmination of a series of failures by the children of Israel, and it brought forth a sharp reaction from God: "How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" In spite of what God was actually doing in their plain sight, the children of Israel chose not to believe in God but to consider only what they were able to do in themselves. This was indeed a despising of who He is. He, then, was prepared to dispossess the whole nation at once. But certainly knowing beforehand Moses' quick and thorough intercession, which appealed to who He is, not just in His power but also in His lovingkindness, and just as certainly relying on it, He pardoned Israel instantly. Yet He would not complete what He was doing for those who rebelled against His intention. He swore according to His own existence that they would not enter in: "But as surely as I live, and as all the earth will be filled with the glory of Jehovah, none of those men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tried Me these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall see the land which I swore to give to their fathers, nor shall any of those who despised Me see it." He determined that they would wander for forty years, one year for every day that the spies had walked through that good land, until the carcasses of all the people, except Joshua and Caleb, had fallen in the wilderness. Those who brought the evil report died by the plague before God, and of the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb remained alive (Num. 14:11-38). Eventually, the Lord fulfilled His oath, for of those who did finally enter the good land at the end of those forty years, none, save Joshua and Caleb, were those who accepted the evil report and chose not to believe in what the Lord was doing for them (Num. 26:63-65; Deut. 2:14-15).

The recurrent reminders of this incident in the Bible, and especially those in Psalm 95, 1 Corinthians 10, and Hebrews 3—4, give the episode prototypical value, and a few important features in it related to unbelief are worth noting. First and always, before

there can be any unbelief among the people of God at all, there is, in contrast, the abiding word of God that expresses God's intention. This focuses on Him and what He is doing, and not on us. Second, there is the evil report, which is based on what is seen in our situation. This focuses on us and on what we cannot do, and not on Him and what He can do. Third, there is the willful choice not to believe God's abiding word, and this amounts to despising who He is and insults Him directly. The choice is easy to make and naturally goes against God's word without effort. The murmuring that ensues tries to justify the choice. Fourth, there is the certain and fearful reaction of God, which comes forth from His righteous being, even if it may be tempered by His lovingkindness. Finally, there is the loss to those who willfully turn away from what God has spoken, and the failure to believe God becomes the failure to enter into what He has intended for them. Eventually and finally, His intention is fulfilled, and the people of God do enter into it in time, but not without some hard dealings and not without a drastic change in who they are, in which the natural man dies off and a new creation, a new generation, is brought forth in faith.

The apostle Paul, in referring to the whole series of failures of the children of Israel, says that "these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition, unto whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Thus, while this final incident is prototypical of unbelief, it is not an inevitable determiner of what will happen to us as New Testament believers. In Paul's view, it is an admonition to us, a negative example that we can and should avoid. Paul points out that in the example *all* followed the Lord under the cloud, that *all* passed through the sea out of Egypt, that *all* ate the *same* spiritual food and drank the *same* spiritual drink, but he emphasizes that "with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn along in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:1-5). And Paul later warns: "So then let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Thus, we can be Christ's New Testament believers and partakers of His spiritual supply and still fall short of what He intends for us.

The writer of Hebrews makes the very same point in his Epistle:

> For who provoked Him when they heard? Indeed was it not all who came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was He displeased for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter into His rest, except to the disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief. (Heb. 3:16-19)

The chief factor of Israel's failure to enter into the good land was unbelief, which amounted to disobedience and sin in God's eyes. The word was heard, but it was not believed, and this provoked the Lord and greatly displeased Him. In the preceding verses of the same chapter, the writer of Hebrews refers to Psalm 95:7-11 to warn us against unbelief, employing a spectrum of notions to describe the true situation of "an evil heart of unbelief": hardening one's heart, provoking God, trying Him, testing Him, going astray in heart from Him, not knowing His ways, falling away from Him, and being hardened by sin (Heb. 3:8-13). All of these taken together show how serious unbelief is, and mainly the seriousness lies in one's relationship with God. While the hardening of one's heart may be the trigger, the intrinsic root of unbelief lies in not really knowing His ways and therefore not trusting Him but rather trying and testing Him, then going astray from Him in heart, and finally simply falling away from Him. Long before one's carcass falls in the wilderness, so to speak, he or she who chooses unbelief has already departed from the Lord and fallen away from Him. In the next chapter the writer of Hebrews brings the example home to us: "Let us fear therefore, lest, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had the good

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news announced to us, even as they also; but the word heard did not profit them, not being mixed together with faith in those who heard" (Heb. 4:1-2). For the children of Israel, the word heard was mixed together with an evil report, and loss ensued; for us, the word heard must be mixed together with faith, which we have already received, for profit.

Admittedly, there is a logic to unbelief, but only if we confine ourselves to mere human considerations. When we know and acknowledge the ways of God in our considerations, the logic of unbelief dissolves.

The Logic of Unbelief

To be sure, unbelief is always the easier route to take because it so naturally presents itself as the better alternative. By nature we are skeptical and unbelieving, and our culture and our upbringing (at least in Western societies) recommend that approach for almost everything. Further, evil reports and opposing conditions always supply even more good reasons not to believe. Admittedly, there is a logic to unbelief, but only if we confine ourselves to mere human considerations. (The striking phrase *the logic of unbelief* is from Witness Lee, *Life-study of Hebrews* 261). When we know and acknowledge the ways of God in our considerations, the logic of unbelief dissolves. *We* here refers to us New Testament believers, who have received faith as the gift of God, not to the unbelievers, who do not have faith at all. There is always a real base for admitting the ways of God into a believer's considerations, if one is willing to. The unbelief that we are addressing then is, ironically, that of God's New Testament believers, not of the unbelievers, who are already condemned. Thus, while it may sound contradictory, there is indeed a real possibility for a believer to choose unbelief, and there are "logical" reasons for it. Let us consider *some* of these reasons.

"I am not able to do this!" This is probably the most common reason to choose unbelief. It is the main reason given by the children of Israel in the prototype of unbelief: "We are not able to go up against the people" (Num. 13:31). And if we consider what we can actually do, the claim is quite true: we can do nothing in ourselves that will please and glorify God (John 15:5). But the word of faith counters: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7), and "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statues, and My ordinances you shall keep and do" (Ezek. 36:27). The Lord has every intention to grant us what we need to carry out His expectations for us. The children of Israel did not know His ways (Psa. 95:10), and therefore, they did not believe that He would make them able to carry out His intention. We must trust and even depend on the Lord for our Christian life and church life moment by moment, and we should abandon any other trust, especially that in ourselves.

"God is not able to do this!" This is perhaps (and hopefully) the least common ground for unbelief, because it goes against the very logic of who God is—the Omnipotent One. He can do all things by virtue alone of being God. But that does not mean that there cannot be some lurking suspicion within us that He cannot do what He says He will do. The Lord heard and accepted Moses' plea: "If You put this people to death as one man, then the nations that have heard the report about You will speak, saying, Because Jehovah was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to give them, He has therefore slaughtered them in the wilderness" (Num. 14:15-16). If God did not dismiss this ground, we probably should not either. But God both dealt with His rebellious people and carried out His intention in time. He is more than able! Perhaps in practicality some may reason in this way: God is not able to do this because of who or how I am, thus shifting the ground from God to themselves. This then becomes just another form of unbelief because of what we cannot do. Some might think that God is not able because they are too stubborn, problematic, uncooperative, etc. But the word of faith counters: "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). God's ability surpasses even our unwillingness.

"This doesn't work at all!" Some encounter failure after failure in their Christian life and church life, and at some point they may begin to doubt the whole economy of God. They may not doubt God Himself, but they doubt that all can be worked out according to His grand plan. They certainly have history on their

side, for both the Old Testament age and the church age so far have not been resounding successes, it seems. But the word of faith counters: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), and "For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). While some believers may harbor doubts in their heart about the whole economy of God, who among them has the boldness to voice such doubts openly before God? Who will lift up this doubt in prayer to God? No one will, we submit, and that alone indicates that this ground for unbelief dissolves easily.

"This is not the only path to reality!" This is a reason for unbelief in the guise of the philosopher. It seems so noble. But in actuality, those who reason in this way simply want reality on their own terms, as though reality bows down to personal tastes. But does it bow down to human taste? God bowed down to become a man; God bowed down to take the form of a slave; God bowed down to die for the sins of the whole world. He certainly bowed down, yet only according to His own taste and for His own intention. Those who doubt the exclusive way that God has placed before us reject the only way for Him to actually save them to the uttermost. But the word of faith counters: "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:23-25). God in Christ is the power and the wisdom that all human beings expect of reality.

"I used to be able to do this, but not anymore!" This is much the same reason for unbelief as the first above, but it comes with a twist. We admit that we once were able to live a proper Christian and church life but confess that we cannot now. But how did we do it before? Assuming that we really were able to walk worthily of the Lord in the past, we had to do it by His mercy and grace. That is certain, because there is no other way (see the first reason above). Thus, we have to testify against ourselves and say that we were indeed able to do it. But what has changed to make us think that we cannot do it anymore? It is not the Lord; it is not His economy; it is not His mercy and grace. The only change is the number of years (or perhaps days), and truly, as we go on in the Christian life, we do become weary. But the word of faith counters: "We should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). The real issue here is again unbelief in ourselves, only this time it is in our ability to endure. Again, the real situation is that we can live this kind of life only by Him who empowers us, but this time it is only by Him who empowers us to endure. As He was able to do in the past, so He is able to do until the end. We should abandon any other trust, especially that in ourselves.

"I was really trying to do this, but God doesn't seem to listen to me anymore!" This is a reason for unbelief that depends on our personal feeling. While we do not discount the importance of personal feeling, can it be that the omniscient and omnipresent and all-powerful Lord is really not listening anymore? Or, is it not really the case that we are not sensing His presence or enjoying His leading? Further, if we are not sensing His presence, then there are two parties who are not happy—we and He. He certainly desires to be present with us not just in our spirit but even more in our soul. We Christians all go through deserts and valleys in our personal feelings. But the word of faith counters: "I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20), and "Surely You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Isa. 45:15). He is always with us and, even more significantly, within us, and He is still working in us even when it seems that He is silent and hidden. This is no ground for unbelief; this is cause for pursuing the Lord personally, affectionately, privately, and spiritually, and He will never let us down in this pursuit.

> Regardless of the reason we have for unbelief, we believers nevertheless have faith as a true and deep basis deep within us.

"I'm afraid of doing this, because the price is so high! I want to enjoy life, not suffer!" This also is much the same reason for unbelief as the first, but with yet another twist. There is a great price to pay in order to have a proper Christian life and church life. Noting that the price is so high and being afraid of paying it amount to confessing that we are not able to do it. But again we can and should do all things through Him who empowers us, including paying this price. Thus, the real issue here is the latter obstacle, the desire to enjoy "life"

and not suffer. We certainly live in an age that craves constant enjoyment, and enjoyment is a powerful anesthetic against all pains and sufferings. But all earthly enjoyment is temporary at best and deceptive at worst. Earthly enjoyment slips away, pain returns, and suffering remains. It is the common lot of all humankind, and this we must honestly admit. But the word of faith counters: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin, considering the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked away to the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). We can be certain that He who created us and knows us is able to satisfy us in every way, be our top enjoyment (with some changes to our tastes in time), and buoy us through sufferings of every kind.

> Faith is the great gift of God that goes beyond our mental assent or doubt. And because faith resides in us, indeed as a living person within us, if we are sensitive to it, we will always find a word of faith rising up within us that counters every reason for unbelief.

"Not many around me take this way. If I do this, I'll look weird, and I might lose my friends!" This is cause for unbelief based on the stampede of the masses. But we should be sober and remember that the masses are, for the most part, stampeding into eternal condemnation because they do not believe. Who needs friends like this? We may wish to be accepted by those who choose to give themselves to this world. But the word of faith counters: "Be saved from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40), and

> If that slave says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat the male servants and the female servants and to eat and to drink and become drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. (Luke 12:45-46)

It is a small pain to look weird to those of the world and to lose friends who are not friends of God in comparison to entering into the joy of our Master (Matt. 25:21, 23).

"Those I looked up to, who were doing this, stopped doing this!" Or, "Someone I looked up to made a huge mistake, and I'm too discouraged to keep doing this!" This is a reason for unbelief because our faith is set on something other than Christ. If anyone around us has stopped pursuing or has failed miserably, the only thing that has really changed in our situation is that we have lost a companion and fellow runner in the race; the race is still on, the goal is still there, and the prize still awaits. When those around us stumble or fall, it is very sad and very discouraging. But the fact that we are saddened and are not rejoicing at all means that deep within us there was (and probably still is) the hope that this one could run with us to the end. Of course, we also are tempted to think that if one falls, then all will fall, including we ourselves. But the word of faith counters: "Put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us, looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). We should always remember that our faith is in and of Christ, not in other human beings and not even in the congregations where we meet. We love and need the believers around us and the church where we meet, but our faith is not in them but in Him. As long as we are looking away unto Him, we will never be discouraged or stumbled.

"I have failed miserably and cannot go on doing this!" This is perhaps the hardest reason in favor of unbelief to overcome because it has hard evidence that stares us in the face. We have been foolish and fallen into some sin. Perhaps we are entangled and cannot seem to get out. To go on with the Christian life and church life seems to be sheer hypocrisy. But the word of faith counters: "Do not rejoice against me, O my enemy; when I fall, I will rise up; when I sit in the darkness, Jehovah will be a light to me" (Micah 7:8), and "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There is no sin that, when confessed, is not immediately forgiven by God. He has committed the blood of His own Son, having become a man, to assure this. We may be deeply affected by our failure, but we are certainly forgiven, and we must choose to stand on His forgiveness to go on with Him.

"I don't have enough faith!" This is the truest and most genuine reason for unbelief and yet the simplest to remedy. Is there not one believer who does not feel this way sometimes? But the word of faith counters: "Jesus said to him, You say, If You can. All things are possible to him who believes. Immediately, crying out, the father of the child said, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24). We are nothing but need, and He is nothing but supply. We and He complement each other profoundly. Not enough faith is enough faith to ask for more faith, and in this case He immediately supplies the need.

This list is certainly not exhaustive, and our rebuttals to the various reasons for unbelief above may not satisfy the needs completely. We suspect that some of our readers will feel that their reasons were either not addressed or not addressed satisfactorily. In a sense, we are not at all unhappy about that, because for those readers we have at least brought their specific reasons for unbelief into focus, and this is very necessary in order to counter unbelief. But regardless of the reason we have for unbelief, we believers nevertheless have faith as a true and deep basis deep within us. This is the great gift of God that goes beyond our mental assent or doubt. And because faith resides in us, indeed as a living person within us, if we are sensitive to it, we will always find a word of faith rising up within us that counters every reason for unbelief. Faith initially came to us in the word, and faith remains in us as the word. Paul speaks of the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2, 5), but he does not indicate the source of the speaking that we hear. Certainly the speaking comes in many outward forms—the Bible, the ministry of the Word, the fellowship with the believers in meetings large and small, to name a few. But just as certainly the speaking wells up from within us through the Spirit who always bears witness with our spirit (Rom. 8:16) and comes to us as the word of faith to extinguish every flicker and flame of unbelief. We believe that this is why the writer of Hebrews, near the end of his reminder about Israel's unbelief and his warning concerning the New Testament believers' unbelief in Hebrews 3:7—4:13, speaks so emphatically concerning the word of God: "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Unbelief is indeed a mixture of thoughts and intentions of the heart. Perhaps there is no list that exhausts all the reasons we can have for it. But "the word of God is living and operative [Gk. ἐνεργὴς (*energēs*), 'working inwardly']"! It lives within us and works deep within us as only His divine energy can; it is very present and very real, so real that we can only hear it and believe it or thrust it away inwardly and shrink back from faith.

The Remedies for Unbelief

After all that has been said in this issue about faith, we hope that it is abundantly clear how great faith is and how ungrateful we will be if we, His New Testament believers, willfully choose unbelief. And beyond ungratefulness, we go against the very grain of our spiritual being, thrusting away what has been put into us by God to make us His believers, if we take the way of unbelief. But there are a few practical remedies to unbelief, in our view, which can spare us from insulting God and imperiling our reward. The first is inward and subjective; the second is outward and objective.

Very often in our Christian life we find ourselves at a seeming fork in the road: unbelief becomes a real option to us—attractive, easy, and visible; and the way of faith seems impossible—discouraging, difficult, and unseen. But the fact is, where faith will take us is not unknown to us at all. All the great promises of God have been clearly spoken to us in the Bible, and deep within we know that those promises are all as true as God is Himself. This is our faith, not as a set of religious doctrines but as a true and real conviction and substantiation. If we consider our experience—and we believe that in this matter the experience of all the believers is the same—we find that faith is more than the ability to believe; it is the inability to not believe! We are now believers, not just in our understanding but also in our constitution and identity. While we may doubt

> No doubt, unbelief is always an attack from God's enemy. But there are effective and reliable remedies to unbelief, and we must settle it in our hearts, once and for all, to avail ourselves of the remedies from now until we meet our dear Lord, the only hope of our faith.

many things easily (doctrines, traditions, ordinances, practices, hypocrisies, deceits, delusions, etc.), we just are not able to shake off the conviction deep within concerning God in Christ and His great and awesome economy, and this inability to not believe is the firm foundation of faith in our being. When we stand before *that* fork in the road, we *must* recognize where we are in the race before us, and we *must* consciously, deliberately, and willfully choose the way of our faith, the way of our very own being, which is now a believing being. We do not need, and probably ought not, to choose to do something, to grunt and try harder, to psych ourselves up and onward; that is, we do not and should not put our trust in ourselves: we know (not just believe) that that will not work. "Do not be afraid—*only believe*" (Mark 5:36; Luke 8:50, emphasis added). Just acknowledge, trust, and accept that you are not able to not believe, and stand with that. Look away from unbelief, and look to the faith that always abides in your being and to the faithful source of that faith: "Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Based on all the promises of God, you can be assured that He will make the way for you to go on. This is why the New Testament exhorts us often to stand in faith and to hold fast to faith in both its objective and subjective senses (1 Cor. 16:13; Col. 1:23; 2 Thes. 2:15; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; Heb. 3:14; Rev. 3:3, 8, 10). At those crucial moments in our Christian life, when we meet yet again those same forks on our path, we must hold fast to faith as the living way and reject unbelief as a viable option.

The second practical remedy for unbelief is apparently only outward. It comes from the writer of Hebrews, as so much help for unbelief does. In his fourth warning to those who were wavering in their faith in Christ and were on the verge of shrinking away from the Christian and church life, he offers this cherishing exhortation, not just to his readers but even to himself:

> Let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope unwavering, for He who has promised is faithful; and let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works, not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:22-25)

The first part of this exhortation is the first and subjective remedy above: holding fast to the full assurance of our faith, knowing that He is faithful. But the second part is the objective remedy: not abandoning all the various meetings of the Christian and church life. These include the large and regular gatherings of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:23), the small and movable gatherings in the homes (cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20), and the smallest and spontaneous gatherings of two or three in the Lord's name (cf. Matt. 18:20). When we find ourselves again at that fork in the road between unbelief and faith, we must hold fast to faith inwardly, but we should also avail ourselves of the practical solution and run to the gatherings with our fellow believers. It is not just an outward action, because when we meet with other believers, we are exhorted, we are encouraged, we are incited to stand in faith. And remarkably, as the writer of Hebrews says, we soon find that we are able to exhort, to encourage and to incite our fellow believers. This builds them up in the faith, and this builds the church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3-4).

Unbelief, though it comes to us at times, should never be an option to us who have believed in Christ. No doubt, it is always an attack from God's enemy. But there are effective and reliable remedies to unbelief, and we must settle it in our hearts, once and for all, to avail ourselves of the remedies from now until we meet our dear Lord, the only hope of our faith. We should bring this matter to the Lord in a deliberate and thorough way, giving ourselves to Him according to the way of faith and asking for His continual mercy and grace for it. He will surely hear this prayer and answer it.

We have written much on faith in this issue and on unbelief in this article. Our prayer has been and still is that all our readers and we ourselves would be exhorted and encouraged and incited toward all the great things of our faith. And so, leaving all these past words with you, we close with these encouraging words, still living and operative after two millennia: "We are persuaded of better things concerning you, beloved, and things which belong to salvation, though we speak thus" (Heb. 6:9), and "'In yet a very little while the Coming One will come and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul does not delight in him.' But we are not of those who shrink back to ruin but of those who have faith to the gaining of the soul" (Heb. 10:37-39). Hallelujah! We have faith!

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MILESTONES

"BELIEVE INTO"

Πιστεύω εἰς Χριστόν (*Pisteuō eis Christon*)

Many languages lack two distinct prepositions, one for expressing location in a place and another for expressing motion toward and entry into a place. In English we are able to distinguish these two notions using the prepositions *in* and *into*. New Testament Greek (unlike Modern Greek) is likewise able to distinguish them, employing ἐν (*en*) for location in a place and εἰς (*eis*) for motion toward and entry into a place. It was a happy coincidence—nay, the sovereignty of God—that New Testament Greek was among the few languages capable of making this distinction, for the authors of the New Testament employed the distinction to capture some of the profoundest truths regarding the believers' organic union with Christ. As is well known, Paul alone speaks of the believers being *in* Christ well over a hundred times (Deissmann 1-2); what is less well known is that the apostles also tell us how we make our way into Christ—the believers come to be *in* Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ, *en Christō*) by their believing *into* Christ (εἰς Χριστόν, *eis Christon*).

The construction *believe into* is found most often in the writings of John, who speaks of believing *into* Christ over thirty times (John 2:11; 3:16, 18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:30; 9:35, 36; 10:42; 11:25, 26, 45, 48; 12:11, 37, 42, 44, 46; 14:1, 12; 16:9; 17:20; 1 John 5:10). But it can likewise be found in the writings of Matthew (Matt. 18:6), Mark (Mark 9:42), Luke (Acts 10:43; 19:4), Paul (Rom. 10:14; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 1:29), and Peter (1 Pet. 1:8). With the exception of James and Jude, then, all the authors of the New Testament employ this striking expression, and this consistent testimony of the apostles is all the more striking for the fact that this particular construction, *believe into*, appears to have been a new creation of the New Testament (Burton 480-481). No clear instances are present in the entirety of the body of Greek texts prior to and contemporaneous with the New Testament. The Septuagint—a Greek translation of the Old Testament often quoted in the New Testament—had itself innovated with the constructions *believe in* (ἐν, *en*) and *believe on* (ἐπί, *epi*), but even these did not seem satisfactory to the authors of the New Testament as they endeavored to put down in writing what they had seen and experienced regarding faith. For while the Septuagint's *believe in* and *believe on* can be found on occasion in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 1:15; Acts 9:42), the most common utterance by far is *believe into*.

Some have contended that we should not belabor these distinctions, arguing that during the writing of the New Testament the distinction between ἐν and εἰς was already collapsing. There is some truth to the claim, for there are instances in the New Testament where εἰς clearly does mean *in* rather than *into* (e.g., Mark 13:9; Luke 11:7). But the majority consensus of New Testament grammarians is that this confusion of ἐν and εἰς is limited to Mark and Luke; Paul and John show no clear evidence of confusion (Zerwick §106; Moulton et al. 3:255; Blass and Debrunner §205; Siebenthal 264, though Blass and Debrunner and Siebenthal think there are some few instances in John). Zerwick thus counsels that "apart from Mk Lk Acts, where it may stand for ἐν, the presumption is that εἰς is to be taken in its full sense" (§106). Moulton, in particular, is worth quoting at some length. He admits that some confusion of ἐν and εἰς is evident in the New Testament but argues that the authors of the New Testament were perfectly aware of the nuances of these prepositions and that we would expect them to employ their specialized use in combination with a word of significant import:

As is well known, Paul alone speaks of the believers being *in* Christ well over a hundred times; what is less well known is that the apostles also tell us how we make our way into Christ—the believers come to be *in* Christ by their believing *into* Christ.

> If it is a word of large content and extensive use, we naturally expect to find these alternative expressions made use of to define the different ideas connected with the word they qualify, so as to set up a series of phrases having a perfectly distinct meaning. In such a case we should expect to see the original force of these expressions, obsolete in contexts where there was nothing to quicken it, brought out vividly where the need of a distinction stimulated it into new life. (1:66-67)

One such "word of large content and extensive use," he rightly contends, is *believe*:

> A critical example is afforded by the construction of πιστεύω…The prepositional construction was…entirely on the lines of development of the Greek language, as we have seen. There was, moreover, a fitness in it for the use for which it was specialised. To repose one's trust *upon* God or Christ was well expressed by πιστεύειν ἐπί, the dative suggesting more of the state, and the accusative more of the initial act of faith; while εἰς recalls at once the bringing of the soul *into* that mystical union which Paul loved to express by ἐν Χριστῷ. (1:67-68)

The majority of New Testament Greek grammarians are thus agreed that in Paul and John, at least, the distinction between ἐν and εἰς is a real one, and one of the most prominent grammarians recognized that the authors of the New Testament employed this distinction to capture the relationship between our believing *into* and our being *in* Christ.

One additional objection to taking the force of *believe* with εἰς as implying motion into and rest in its object is the argument that in and of itself εἰς is not limited in meaning to 'into'. This is true; εἰς has a variety of extended meanings in the Greek of the New Testament. But its radical sense is indeed 'into', and this radical sense is particularly prominent when followed by "nouns that denote an accessible place" (Bauer et al. s.v. "εἰς") and when combined "with Verbs which express *rest in* a place, when a previous motion *into* or *to* it is implied" (Liddell and Scott s.v. "εἰς"). Christ is certainly an "accessible place," as evidenced by Paul's frequent reference to the believers' being "in Christ" and by John's frequent reference, based on the Lord's own charge, to abide in Christ. And while, on the face of it, the verb *to believe* does not seem to imply motion and rest, there is ample evidence in the New Testament that its authors thought of it in precisely this way. One of the clearest examples is John's near synonymous use of believing into the Son and coming to the Son (Harris 236). While these two themes run through the whole of John's Gospel, they come into closest conjunction in John 6:35: "He who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst." Coming to the Lord and believing into Him are here used interchangeably, implying that John thinks of believing in terms of motion. And we can see this same notion hinted at in several other places in the New Testament: John tells us that he who believes "does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). The Lord charged the crowd to "believe into the light" so that they would not "remain in darkness" (John 12:36, 46). Paul tells us that "we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:2) and that "we who have believed enter into the rest" (Heb. 4:3). Faith, in short, is a great "door" (Acts 14:27) through which we enter into life, light, grace, and rest.

With the exception of James and Jude, all the authors of the New Testament employ the striking expression *believe into*, and this consistent testimony of the apostles is all the more striking for the fact that this particular expression appears to have been a new creation of the New Testament.

The Lord Himself, of course, is all these things—He is the life (John 11:25); He is the light (John 12:46); He is the grace (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 15:10); and He is the true rest (Matt. 11:28-29). Finally, one finds in the New Testament a close conjunction between believing and baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 18:8; Eph. 4:5), the latter being a sign of the former. To believe and to be baptized are not mere acts by which we signal our commitment to Christian teaching and the Christian church; just as we are baptized *into* Christ, *into* His death, and *into* His Body (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13), so too we believe *into* Him and thereby enter into Him as a realm for our existence, living, and function.

The authors of the New Testament thus clearly

thought of faith as a means for the believers to enter into an organic union with Christ and to thus partake of all that He is. In their attempt to communicate this great light in their writings, they were willing to introduce into the Greek language a new construction where no suitable turn of phrase was available. They cared little whether in doing so they struck the ear of their readers oddly. They cared only to faithfully set down what they had received from the Lord regarding the profoundest effect of their faith in Him: that believing was entering into Christ so as to be in Him and to abide in Him.

Credere in Christum

As Christianity spread outside of the Greek-speaking world, it became necessary to translate the New Testament into a variety of languages. Some of these languages were unable to capture the nuances of this newly coined Greek phrase, but one was—the language of the Romans and of the Roman Empire. Sometime near the end of the second century, the New Testament was translated into Latin in North Africa and from there spread throughout the Roman world, undergoing continual revision as it spread (Bogaert 505-507). Latin lacked two distinct prepositions corresponding to the Greek prepositions ἐν and εἰς, but Latin could nevertheless distinguish between the notions of location in a place and entry into a place by using the Latin preposition *in* and varying the grammatical case of the following noun or pronoun. Latin used *in* followed by a noun or pronoun in the ablative case for location in a place; it used *in* followed by a noun or pronoun in the accusative case for entry into a place. When the earliest Latin translators of the New Testament came upon the innovative construction *believe into*, they captured its sense by employing the verb *credere* ('to believe') followed by the preposition *in* and an object in the accusative case, implying that by their faith the believers make motion toward and enter into Christ as the object of their faith. In doing so, they, like the authors of the Greek New Testament before them, introduced into their language a new utterance, for this particular construction is peculiar to Latin Christian literature (TeSelle 349).

By the fourth century so many different Latin versions of the Bible were in use that Jerome (d. 420) complained: "There are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies" (*NPNF*^{2} 6:488). As a solution, Pope Damasus (d. 384) commissioned Jerome to produce a standardized Latin text of the Gospels (possibly even of the entire Bible), and today the fully standardized Latin Bible is known as the Vulgate. Jerome began this project by revising older Latin translations of the four Gospels, and he thankfully preserved the faithful work of the early translators with respect to the construction *believe into*, making it available to readers of the Latin Bible to this very day. It might be argued that these early Latin translators were unaware of the nuances of the Greek language. But this is clearly not the case, for the Vulgate does not always translate the Greek εἰς using the Latin *in* followed by an accusative object. Indeed, in Mark 13:9 and Luke 11:7, identified above as places where εἰς clearly does mean *in* rather than *into*, the Vulgate correctly uses *in* plus the ablative, indicating location within a place rather than motion into a place. It also on occasion translates *believe into* (εἰς) using *in* plus the ablative (e.g., 1 John 5:10), in particular whenever the New Testament speaks of believing into the *name* of the Lord (e.g., John 1:12; 2:23). We have all the reason to believe, therefore, that Jerome and the earlier Latin translators carefully considered the meaning of the Greek preposition εἰς and deliberately preserved the sense of *believe into* when they translated it the way that they did.

> Augustine's grasp of Greek was weaker than he would have liked, but the faithful work of the early Latin Bible translators enabled him to see something regarding the intrinsic work of faith. Augustine realized that the faith counted by God as righteousness entails believing into Christ—that is, moving into Christ.

Their faithful work did not go unnoticed by Latin-speaking writers, for Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), working from one of the older Latin biblical texts of John's Gospel, clearly distinguishes between two kinds of believing—believing God and believing *into* God.

To believe God is simply to believe what God says. Anyone, even demons, can believe God in this way. But commenting on John 6:29 (in "Homily 29" in *WSA* III/12), Augustine argues that the work of God is not to believe Christ but to believe *into* Christ:

> "This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom He sent" [John 6:29]. "That you believe into Him (*credatis in eum* [accusative])," not, "that you believe Him (*credatis ei* [dative])." But if you believe into Him (*creditis in eum*), you believe Him; however, it does not follow that one who believes Him believes into Him (*credit in eum*). For the demons indeed believed Him, but they did not believe into Him (*non credebant in eum*). And also on the other hand, we can say of the apostles themselves that we believe Paul, but we cannot say that we believe into Paul (*credimus in Paulum*); that we believe Peter, but not that we believe into Peter (*credimus in Petrum*). "For to the one believing into Him (*credenti enim in eum*) who justifies the wicked, his faith is counted for righteousness." What is it therefore to believe into Him (*credere in eum*)? It is by believing to love, by believing to esteem, by believing to go into Him (*credendo in eum ire*) and to be incorporated with His members. That, therefore, is the faith which God requires from us. (*CCSL* 36:287)

"What is it therefore to believe into Him? It is by believing to love, by believing to esteem, by believing to go into Him and to be incorporated with His members." —Augustine

Augustine's grasp of Greek was weaker than he would have liked (*WSA* I/1:52-55), but the faithful work of the early Latin translators enabled him to see something regarding the intrinsic work of faith. Augustine realized that the faith counted by God as righteousness entails believing into Christ—that is, moving into Christ, "to go into Him." In going into Christ, the believers are incorporated into Him as members of His mystical Body.

In another sermon ("Sermon 130A" in *WSA* III/11) Augustine insists that no mere human being would have the audacity to say, "Believe into me." To do so, according to Augustine, would be insane, for we cannot enter into a mere human being by our believing:

> "This is" in fact "the work of God, that you should believe into Him whom He sent" [John 6:29]. He did not say "that you should believe Him (*credatis ei* [dative])" or "that you should believe something about Him (*credatis eum* [accusative without the preposition])" but said, on the contrary, "that you should believe into Him (*credatis in eum* [accusative with the preposition])." We heard the eloquence of the prophets. We believe them, but we do not believe into them (*non credimus in eos*). We heard the apostles who proclaimed. We believe their proclamations, but we do not believe into the apostles (*in eos non credimus*). We do not believe into Paul (*non credimus in Paulum*), but we do believe Paul…Indeed, not only the holy apostles and teachers, but also we ourselves, who should not be compared with them in even the smallest ways, say every day, "Believe me"; we never dare to say, "Believe into me (*crede in me*)." "Believe me"; who doesn't say this? "Believe into me (*crede in me*)"; who says this, or who says this who isn't insane? (*BA* 77/B:344, 346)

The contrast that Augustine makes here between believing someone, believing something about someone, and believing *into* someone is again striking, clearly indicating that Augustine was aware of the novelty of the latter Latin construction. Latin speakers, according to Augustine, were accustomed to saying that they believed others or that they believed various things. But they never said, in normal Latin speech, that they believed *into* some person. The striking new utterance in the Latin Bible and its absence in normal Latin parlance prod the reader to see the profound difference between faith in Christ and any other kind of common believing. Because faith in Christ, unlike any other kind of believing, brings the believer into Christ, a new phrase was needed in Latin (as it was in Greek) to capture this new reality. And since this new phrase entails motion into the object of belief, Augustine contends that no one would be so audacious as to say, "Believe into me," unless, perhaps, they were "insane."

As is well known, Augustine most commonly identifies saving faith as faith operating through love. And this has caused many interpreters of Augustine to reduce his understanding of *credere in* with an accusative object to little more than faith operating through love. It seems that this mistaken understanding goes all the way back to Augustine's own congregants, for in this same sermon Augustine responds to a challenge (whether real or imagined) that if saving faith is merely faith operating through love, there is in fact no reason we cannot believe into Paul, since we certainly love Paul. Augustine responds by again expounding on the uniting function of faith, and at least here he identifies this uniting function of faith as prior to and enabling the believers' love for Christ:

> Someone could indeed respond to me and advise that I speak more carefully: "You said that to believe into Christ (*credere in Christum*) is to love Christ, and you said that we should believe into Christ (*credere nos debere in Christum*) but not believe into Paul (*non autem credere in Paulum*); should we not love Paul then?" Now, just as we made a distinction between two kinds of believing, so we should also distinguish loving itself. I love Paul even though I don't believe into Paul (*non credo in Paulum*). But I don't love Christ unless I first believe into Christ (*nisi credidero in Christum*). I certainly love Paul, but by loving him I don't go into Paul (*non—diligendo—eo in Paulum*). I will be with Paul; I won't be in Paul. "Indeed what is Apollos, what is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed," not "into whom you believed (*in quos credidistis*)." So, brothers, it is necessary to believe into God (*credere in deum*), by believing and loving to go into Christ (*ire in Christum*). "Believe into God (*credite in deum*)," says Christ Himself, "and believe into Me (*in me credite*)" [John 14:1]. What prophet dared to say this, what patriarch dared to say this, what apostle dared to say this, what martyr dared to say this, what angel dared to say this? (*BA* 77/B:354)

Here again Augustine identifies genuine Christian faith as faith that brings the believer into Christ, and he clearly thinks of this uniting function of faith as prior to the believers' love for Christ. Love certainly unites the believers to Christ, according to Augustine, but believing has its own uniting function, which operates prior to union with Christ through love.

In a third sermon ("Sermon 144" in *WSA* III/4), Augustine again explains the great significance of faith. Here he emphasizes the mutual character of our union with Christ. Faith not only brings the believer into Christ but also brings Christ into the believer:

> It makes quite the difference whether one believes that He is the Christ (*credat ipsum Christum* [accusative without the preposition]) or whether one believes into Christ (*credat in Christum* [accusative with the preposition]). For even the demons believed that He was the Christ, yet the demons did not believe into Christ (*nec tamen in Christum daemones crediderunt*)…So then, the one who believes into Christ (*in Christum credit*), by believing into Christ (*credendo in Christum*), Christ comes into him, and in a certain way he is united to Him and is made a member in His Body. (*PL* 38:788)

On at least three occasions, then, Augustine expounds on the function of faith to bring the believer into Christ. And while Augustine's distinctions between different kinds of believing are perfectly clear in Latin, English translators of Augustine's works have tended to blunt Augustine's point by translating *credere in* with an accusative object as "believe in" instead of "believe into." Edmund Hill, for example, translates the first quote from Augustine above as follows: "What then does it mean, to believe in him? By believing to love (*amare*) him, by believing to cherish (*diligere*) him, to go to him by believing and be incorporated in his members" (*WSA* III/12:493). Augustine's *believe into* (*credere in*) is translated "believe in," and his *go into Him* (*in eum ire*) is translated "go to him." Such hesitancy to bring the Latin construction fully into English makes it difficult for readers to understand the distinctions so important to Augustine's overall point—that faith brings the believers *into* Christ, causing them "to go into" Christ. Because of the general inadequacy of available English translations of these passages, we have had to freshly translate the passages quoted above, doing our best to preserve Augustine's insights on this novel Latin construction.

Augustine's comments on believing into Christ would have widespread reach, appearing hundreds of times in significant works of biblical and systematic theology across the Western Christian traditions for centuries to come.

Augustine's comments on believing into Christ would have widespread reach, appearing hundreds of times in significant works of biblical and systematic theology across the Western Christian traditions for centuries to come—including works by the Catholic apologist John Adam Moehler (d. 1838) (122n3), the Lutheran scholastic Johann Gerhard (d. 1637) (19:115-116), the Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (d. 1669) (485), the Anglican theologian Jeremy Taylor (d. 1667) (*WWJT* 2:305), and the father of Puritan theology, William Perkins (d. 1602) (*WWP* 5:323).

This widespread appropriation of Augustine's comments likely resulted from their appearance in two of the most influential works of medieval Christendom. Almost seven hundred years after Augustine's

death, Peter Lombard (d. 1160) summarized Augustine's insight on the uniting function of faith in his famous *Sentences* (3:98-99), which would become a standard theological textbook for the next four hundred years. During the same century, Augustine's comments were included in the *Glossa Ordinaria* (in its commentary on Romans 4:5 [63]), the most important and influential annotated Bible of the medieval period, providing commentary on nearly every verse of the Bible from numerous patristic and medieval writers. The reproduction of Augustine's insight in the most influential medieval textbook of theology and in the most influential medieval annotated Bible ensured that Augustine's understanding of the distinction between believing and believing *into* would be available to thousands of Latin-speaking theologians and biblical scholars all over Europe for centuries to come.

"Bileue into Christ"

One of those Latin-speaking scholars was an English theologian by the name of John Wycliffe (d. 1384), the man responsible for the first complete translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into the English language—the translation that came to be known as the Wycliffite Bible. Wycliffe was clearly aware of Augustine's insights regarding the significance of believing *into* Christ, for he quotes the first of Augustine's passages above in *On the Truth of Holy Scriptures* (119) and draws attention to the importance of the distinction between *believing* and *believing into* in a number of other places (e.g., *De civili dominio* 2:66; *Sermones* 1:294). While it is difficult to say exactly how much Wycliffe was directly involved in the work of biblical translation, "the very strong contemporary evidence linking Wyclif with the translation implies that at the least he initiated the project and actively supervised it" (Dove 81), and the earliest versions of the Wycliffite Bible (known as the EV) seem to have been completed within Wycliffe's lifetime. Given his likely involvement in these early versions and his familiarity with Augustine's comments, it is no surprise that the early versions of the Wycliffite Bible matched the innovations of the Greek and Latin New Testaments with its own English innovation, consistently translating the Vulgate's *credere in* with an accusative object as "bileue into"—the Middle English equivalent of *believe into*. John 9:35 reads, "Bileuest thou into the sone of God"; John 11:26 reads, "Bileueth into me"; and John 14:1 reads, "Thee bileuen into God, bileue thee into me" (Manchester 63v, 64v, 66v).

Given Wycliffe's familiarity with Augustine's comments on believing into Christ, it is no surprise that the early versions of the Wycliffite Bible matched the innovations of the Greek and Latin New Testaments with its own English innovation: "bileue into"—the Middle English equivalent of *believe into*.

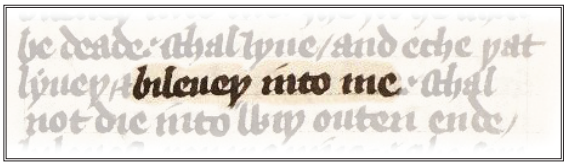

Image provided by The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester. Highlighted text reads, "bileueth into me," from John 11:26 (Manchester 64v).

Despite the faithfulness of these early Wycliffite Bible translators, it is one of the great tragedies of the history of English biblical translation that the later revision of the Wycliffite Bible (known as the LV) undid this faithful translation by replacing all but a few instances of *believe into* with *believe in* (the Forshall and Madden edition of the LV retains *believe into* in: John 12:37; 17:20; Rom. 10:14; 1 Pet. 1:8). Whether Wycliffe himself was directly involved in this decision is unknown; what is known is that the LV was produced sometime well after his death (Hudson 158). Since that time, no English translation of the Bible, to the best of our knowledge, has employed the English phrase *believe into* except for the Holy Bible Recovery Version (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2003).

English-speaking theologians and biblical scholars continue to draw attention to this innovative phrase in the Greek New Testament. Leon Morris notes that the Greek construction "literally…means to believe

'into,'" denoting "a faith which, so to speak, takes a man out of himself, and puts him into Christ" (358). Jouette Bassler affirms that "for Paul, believing in Christ meant believing *into* Christ" (4). Sinclair Ferguson says of our union with Christ, "Its full realization takes place in our own existence when the Spirit unites us to Christ by faith. In Paul's idiosyncratic language, we 'believe *into* [*pisteuein eis*] Christ'" (110). R. T. France says that "John's special expression 'believe into' is…closely related to Paul's language about the incorporation of believers 'into' the body of Christ, so that they are 'in Christ'" (225). According to Francis Moloney, "A sense of 'motion' from one place to another is…found in a famous Johannine expression which almost defies translation. For John, true faith is 'faith *into*' (Greek: *pisteuein eis*) Christ. It may be difficult in English, but it reflected the concrete experience of the earliest Christians" (37). Sam K. Williams notes the parallel between believing into Christ and being baptized into Christ:

> Just as Paul can say that one comes to be "in Christ" by being baptized into Christ, so he can say that one *believes* into Christ. In this second expression, too, *eis* implies movement, change, the transfer from one order of existence to another. Thus to "believe into Christ" is the *means* by which one comes to be "in Christ." (443)

Some English study Bibles have helpfully drawn attention to the phrase in footnotes. In particular, the *ESV Study Bible* includes a commendable note on John 11:25 highlighting the literal meaning of the Greek phrase along with its implications for the believers' union with Christ:

> The preposition translated 'in' (Gk. *eis*) is striking, for *eis* ordinarily means 'into,' giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people 'into' Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ. (This same expression is found in 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35; 7:38; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:10.) (2046)

Since the time of the Wycliffite Bible, no English translation of the Bible, to the best of our knowledge, has employed the English phrase *believe into* except for the Holy Bible Recovery Version.

But English Bible translations continue to render the construction inadequately in the text of the Bible itself (despite the fact that Leon Morris was one of the translators of the 1978 New International Version and R. T. France was a member of the NIV Committee on Bible Translation responsible for the 2011 revision). For the vast majority of English Bible readers, then, the innovative phrase of the Greek New Testament, the Latin New Testament, and the earliest English New Testament remains entirely hidden. Thankfully, the Recovery Version has recovered this lost utterance for English readers, consistently employing the phrase *believe into* and explaining that the word *into* "implies that the believer has an organic union with Christ through believing into Him" (Lee, Phil. 1:29, note 1).

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CCSL *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-.

NPNF^2 Schaff, Philip, ed. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Series 2. 1890-1900. 14 vols. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Salvation by Works

Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King, by Matthew W. Bates. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

In *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* (hereafter *Allegiance*), Matthew W. Bates, assistant professor of theology at Quincy University, observes that "contemporary Christian culture often comes prepackaged with functional ideas and operative definitions of belief, faith, works, salvation, heaven, and the gospel that in various ways truncate and distort the full message of the good news about Jesus the Messiah that is proclaimed in the Bible" (2-3). Based on this observation, he attempts to help Christians rethink the gospel, faith, and salvation (5). At the center of this reconsideration is the proposal that πίστις (*pistis*), the Greek word rendered "faith," insofar as it relates to salvation, really means and should be rendered "allegiance" (8). He considers that *allegiance*, which includes the meaning of "embodied loyalty" (5, 89), a form of works, better captures Paul's meaning when he uses *pistis* in connection with salvation in his Epistles. Bates, however, is hardly able to support this claim from Scripture. Instead, he leans on extrabiblical literature and the cultural context at the time of Paul's writing to establish his proposal.

In addition to an introduction, Bates structures his arguments into nine chapters: three addressing faith (chs. 1, 4, and 5), two addressing the gospel (chs. 2—3), two examining the result of salvation (chs. 6—7), one reconsidering justification (ch. 8), and the last elaborating on what it means to practice faith as allegiance (ch. 9). In his own words, the essence of his arguments is:

> 1. The true climax of the gospel—Jesus's enthronement—has generally been deemphasized or omitted from the gospel.
> 2. Consequently, *pistis* has been misaimed and inappropriately nuanced with respect to the gospel. It is regarded as "trust" in Jesus's righteousness alone or "faith" that Jesus's death covers my sins rather than "allegiance" to Jesus as king.
> 3. Final salvation is not about attainment of heaven but about embodied participation in the new creation. When the true goal of salvation is recognized, terms such as "faith," "works," "righteousness," and "the gospel" can be more accurately reframed.
> 4. Once it is agreed that salvation is by allegiance alone, matters that have traditionally divided Catholics and Protestants—the essence of the gospel, faith alone versus works, declared righteousness versus infused righteousness—are reconfigured in ways that may prove helpful for reconciliation. (9)

The first three chapters of *Allegiance* are foundational to Bates's central claim that *pistis* should be understood as allegiance. In those chapters, he presents what he considers to be misconceptions of faith (15-25) and outlines his understanding of the true gospel (29-38). Among other matters, Bates highlights two points that are foundational to his thesis in these chapters. The first is that *pistis* is not the opposite of works. He claims that in some New Testament contexts where *pistis* is rendered "faithfulness," *pistis* might include the meaning of works, but not works of law (22). His second crucial point is that the climax of the gospel is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord (37). He argues that the exaltation of Christ is the most important part of the gospel today because "Jesus's reign corresponds to the *present* epoch of world history that we find ourselves in now" (67). That is, Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection do not occupy the same position of importance because they are past events (39, 67). This assertion, however, neglects the fact that the New Testament writers emphasized different aspects of Jesus' accomplishment, especially His resurrection, according to the need of their recipients (2 Tim. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Acts 3:15-16, 26; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30-38; Rom. 4:24-25).

In the fourth chapter, "Faith as Allegiance," Bates arrives at the heart of his thesis. Based on his conclusion that Jesus' reign as King is the most important part of the gospel, he asserts: "The gospel reaches its zenith with Jesus's installation and sovereign rule as the Christ, the king. As such, *faith* in Jesus is best described as *allegiance* to him as king" (77). He puts forth four arguments as support for this view: (1) *pistis* sometimes has the meaning of allegiance in apocryphal texts composed around the time of the New Testament; (2) since Paul regards Jesus as Lord, the most natural way for him to speak of how people relate to Him is in terms of allegiance; (3) understanding faith as allegiance seems to resolve some puzzling matters in Paul's letters; and (4) *pistis* as allegiance fits into the broader context of the New Testament world (78).

Bates's arguments are problematic from several standpoints. First, the fact that his primary argument requires him to look outside of the Scriptures to find the exact meaning of *pistis* that he desires should raise a question in the mind of the reader. If the meaning

of *pistis* as allegiance is evident in the Scriptures, why does Bates need to look elsewhere to establish the claim? Second, even if we accept Bates's examining of various apocryphal texts—including 3 Maccabees 3:2-4; 5:32; 1 Maccabees 10:25-27; and Esther 13:3-4—in order to give "examples where *pistis* must carry the precise meaning of allegiance" (79-80, 4), none of the texts where he finds this meaning are related to the gospel, the scope that Bates defines for the use of *pistis* as allegiance. Thus, his understanding of faith as allegiance is little more than reading meaning into the text of the New Testament. Third, when Bates does give attention to New Testament passages to support his claim, he mainly notes that since the final instance of *pistis* in Romans 3:3 must be translated as "faithfulness" (i.e., God's faithfulness), then the nuance of fidelity in the word *faithfulness* should not be excluded from the meaning of *pistis* in Paul's presentation of justification by faith in Romans 3:21 and following verses (81). Of course, merely exporting meaning from one location to another without consideration of context is not a reasonable way to substantiate a claim. Nevertheless, instead of analyzing the other portions of the New Testament that he cites for evidence (Rom. 3:21-25; 5:1; Gal. 2:16, 20; 5:4-6; Phil. 3:8-11; 1 Cor. 1:21; 15:1-2), Bates simply translates πίστις and πιστεύω in those portions as, respectively, "allegiance" and "to give allegiance" and concludes that "if we remember that the allegiance concept welds mental agreement, professed fealty, and embodied loyalty, foregrounding allegiance makes excellent contextual sense in all of these crucial passages" (82). Yet, he gives no explanation as to why foregrounding allegiance makes contextual sense. Fourth, Bates claims that the most obvious way to speak of relationship to a king is loyalty or allegiance and applies this to Paul's writings, yet he never cites a portion of these writings in support of that understanding. He merely jumps to the conclusion that understanding *pistis* as allegiance must be true because the relationship of kings to subjects in the natural realm is that of loyalty (83).

The fact that Bates's primary argument requires him to look outside of the Scriptures to find the exact meaning of *pistis* that he desires should raise a question in the mind of the reader. If the meaning of *pistis* as allegiance is evident in the Scriptures, why does Bates need to look elsewhere to establish the claim?

Setting aside all of Bates's unsubstantiated claims, the ultimate purpose of *Allegiance* is to advance an understanding of "final salvation" by works (205-213). To this end Bates argues,

> The relationship between *pistis* and works is not one of cause to effect but rather of overlapping nested categories. The larger category or set (*pistis* as allegiance) can include a portion of the smaller category or subset (works as embodied allegiance) as the Holy Spirit empowers us for right living. (110)

This concept flies in the face of Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-9. Indeed, when Bates addresses Paul's assertion in that passage, he is able to state only that faith in Ephesians 2:8 should be understood as allegiance; he does not address the following verse: "Not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:9). Whereas Bates suggests on several occasions (22, 110-112) that when Paul rejects works-based salvation, he is actually rejecting works related to law, not works related to allegiance, Ephesians 2:9 clearly excludes works of any kind (cf. Rom. 4:2-5). One should believe that the apostle Paul would specify works of law if he intended to exclude only works of law. After all, in other portions of the Scriptures, such as Galatians 2:16 and others that Bates happily cites (115-117), Paul specifies "works of law" when he means works of law.

Perhaps Bates's concern, as with many who choose to advance a works-based salvation, is that salvation by faith as it is popularly announced and misunderstood may lead believers into a living that is not befitting of the Christian or of Christ. True as this may be, the solution is not to opt for a salvation dependent on works, which is contrary to the Scriptures, but to see the truth concerning the kingdom reward and discipline, which serve as an incentive and a warning to the believers concerning their living today. Whereas *Allegiance* may be the result of a genuine desire to help the believers, it does more to distract the believers, obscure their understanding of salvation, and weaken their faith than it does to help.

by I. Joel Oladele

A Commendable Exploration of Pauline Faith

Faith as Participation: An Exegetical Study of Some Key Pauline Texts, by Jeanette Hagen Pifer. WUNT 2/486. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

In *Faith as Participation* Jeanette Hagen Pifer, Professor of New Testament at Biola University, offers a compact and insightful study of the Pauline conception of faith, rooted in meticulous exegesis and guided by noble convictions. This study, a lightly revised version of the author's doctoral thesis, is motivated by the basic question of what Paul means by faith (1, 37). In her introductory chapter Pifer clarifies that her interest is not simply in the meaning of the word *pistis* in Paul's Epistles but, more broadly, in Paul's concept of faith generally and in the role that faith plays within the broader scope of his theology (37-38). She also reveals that "the primary conviction driving this study is that an accurate understanding of the way that Paul portrays faith should provide clarification to a number of notorious debates, namely on the centre of Pauline theology, on the relation between human and divine agency, and on the interpretation of the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ" (37). (These three debates are unpacked in the introductory chapter and revisited throughout the monograph.) In terms of methodology, Pifer focuses her exegetical study in her chapters 2 through 6 on four Pauline Epistles: 1 Thessalonians (ch. 2), 1 Corinthians (ch. 3), 2 Corinthians (ch. 4), and Galatians (chs. 5—6).

As Pifer works through these four Epistles, she successfully draws out many fine details concerning Paul's conception of faith. She notes, for example, that faith entails an "actively passive receiving" of Christ (44), a confident and continuous standing upon Christ (79), and the "simultaneous act of renouncing self-confidence and exercising full dependence on Christ" (118). One of her broader claims, reiterated throughout her study, is that faith serves as the believers' mode of existence. Faith is "the mode of existence in which one is firmly grounded and dependent on Christ" (51), the "sphere of the believer's existence" (72), the "chief description for the human mode of existence for those 'in Christ'" (172), an "ongoing state of dependence on Christ" that is "descriptive of a believer's entire life in Christ" (221). In one of her fuller definitions of Pauline faith, she writes that faith is "the mode of existence by which the believer participates in the Christ-event and appropriates all the benefits thereof; as such, it is necessarily self-negating and thus self-involving in the person and work of Christ" (159).

In Pifer's reading of Paul, this conception of faith—as the believers' mode of existence—is closely related to the Pauline theme of participation in Christ, which she describes as "an important thread" in her discussion of faith (11n59). She explains that her use of the term *participation* "conveys an attempt to synthesize Paul's many prepositional expressions (e.g. ἐν Χριστῷ, σὺν Χριστῷ, εἰς Χριστὸν and related phrases) with larger themes such as 'dying and rising with Christ,' 'the body of Christ,' and possession and indwelling of the Spirit" (11n59). As the title of her monograph indicates, Pifer intuits that faith and participation are so tightly interwoven in Paul's understanding that it is possible to speak of faith *as* participation, and she attempts to accentuate this participatory view of faith in chapter after chapter. In chapter 2, on faith and participation in 1 Thessalonians, she perceives a close connection between the Thessalonians' faith in Christ and their participation in His death and resurrection. Drawing on 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and related verses, she suggests that the Thessalonians' "faith in a future participation in the resurrection is based on the experience of participation in Christ through faith in their earthly life" (61). She further suggests that "by faith, the believer is wrapped up in the Christ-mediated process of salvation through identifying with the Christ-event (past), living in a new mode of dependent existence upon a new Lord (present), and living always with hope of being reunited with him in the future" (62). Faith, then, is "absolutely and fundamentally participatory in nature" (62). In chapter 3, on faith and participation in 1 Corinthians, she claims, based on her exegesis of 1 Corinthians 1—2, that faith is "a form of participation in Christ" (74). In chapter 4, on faith and participation in 2 Corinthians, she writes that it is "by faith"—understood as "a human appropriation of divine enablement"—that "one participates in Christ" (118). In subsequent chapters she observes such a tight connection between faith and participation, especially in Galatians, that she equates the two, claiming that "faith is participation in Christ" (173). Referring to Galatians 2:19b-20 as the "*crux interpretum*" for the idea of faith as participation, she explains that the life that the believers live in identification with Christ's crucifixion "occurs in the mode of πίστις," which "is participation in Christ" (219). As she navigates through Paul's Epistles, Pifer thus finds that faith is the mode of participation in Christ and, perhaps more profoundly, that faith *is* participation in Christ.

Throughout her monograph Pifer attempts to show how this participatory understanding of Pauline faith, with its many nuances, elucidates the three broader debates over Paul's theology foregrounded in her introductory chapter. Concerning the debate over the center

of Paul's theology, Pifer rightly rejects the notion that justification by faith and participation in Christ are somehow at odds in Paul's theology and argues instead that the apostle successfully holds these two matters together. More pointedly, she claims that faith is crucial to both justification and participation, demonstrating throughout her monograph that "faith is not simply the entry point to justification" but is "descriptive of a believer's entire life in Christ" (221). Concerning the debate over the relationship between human and divine agency, Pifer observes early in her study that Paul's theology of faith rests on the axiom that "faith arises and remains in a believer always and only through a prior divine act" (46). As her study progresses, she reiterates this underlying idea, emphasizing that the believers' faith expresses their complete dependence on divine agency. "Human faith," she argues, "is a response to and an absolute dependence upon the divine" (153); it is "a mode that is wholly Christ-focused and empowered by divine agency" (170). Pifer concludes that her study of faith ultimately clarifies "the quandary of agency in that faith defines what kind of agents humans are—agents wholly dependent on the divine" (223). Concerning the debate over how the Pauline expression πίστις Χριστοῦ should be interpreted, Pifer favors an objective genitive reading ("faith in Christ") over a subjective genitive reading ("faith(fulness) of Christ"). She worries that the subjective genitive reading diminishes the human element of faith by shifting the focus from the believers' faith in Christ to Christ's own faith or faithfulness. As a result, "human agency becomes obfuscated" (222). Pifer's preference for the objective genitive reading seems largely driven by her broader understanding of how divine and human agency are related. She reasons that "the objective genitive reading preserves the theological priorities held by those who advocate the subjective genitive reading while also conveying the vital role of human faith that pervades the Pauline corpus" (222). According to Pifer the faith of which Paul speaks is a human faith in the sense that humans are the subject of faith, but at the same time it is "thoroughly Christocentric" because it is "the chief way for humans to express that Christ alone has accomplished everything for salvation" (222). In her mind the objective genitive reading comports well with the essential principle in Paul's theology that "the power of God precedes and elicits the πίστις of humans" (222).

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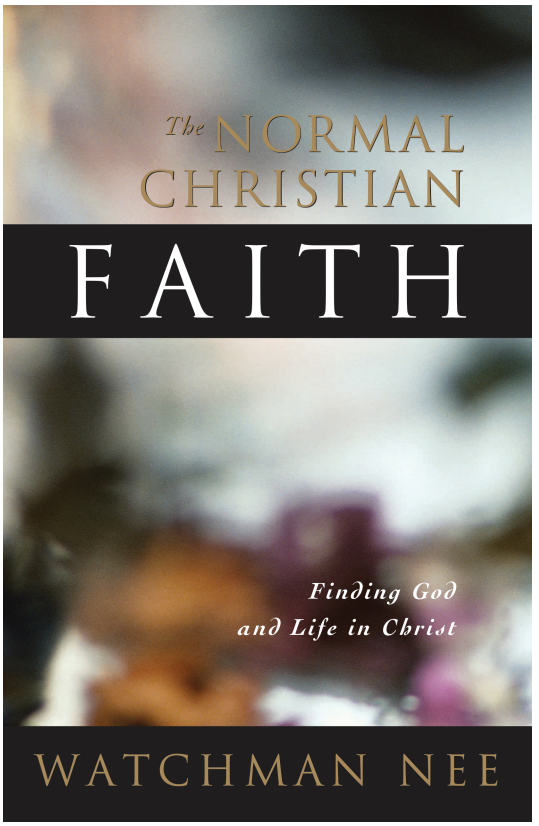
Readers who follow Pifer throughout her study should, at the very least, come away with a fuller understanding of Paul's notion of faith and a greater appreciation of its significance for the Christian life. In terms of her core thesis, Pifer largely succeeds in demonstrating that the believers' faith is closely related to their participation in Christ, which encompasses their union with Christ and their ongoing, subjective experience of His death and resurrection. We find Pifer's persistent attentiveness to the participatory dimensions of faith to be one of the more commendable features of her monograph. However, there is some ambiguity, if not inconsistency, in her monograph regarding faith's exact relationship to participation: in some passages faith is presented as the means of participating in Christ, whereas in others faith is presented as participation itself. Clarifying whether a meaningful distinction exists between these two conceptions of faith's relationship to participation would strengthen the monograph's core thesis. Additionally, Pifer's discussion of the debates surrounding the expression πίστις Χριστοῦ is constrained by a common assumption in Pauline studies: that the genitive (Χριστοῦ) must be either subjective or objective. But there are other interpretative possibilities that Pifer does not consider, namely that the genitive can be read as an appositive, or epexegetical, genitive, with the sense 'the faith that Christ Himself is'. Given Pifer's central thesis that faith is participation in Christ, consideration of this epexegetical possibility could have significantly bolstered her case. These limitations aside, Pifer's *Faith as Participation* proves to be a fruitful exegetical endeavor.

by John-Paul Petrash



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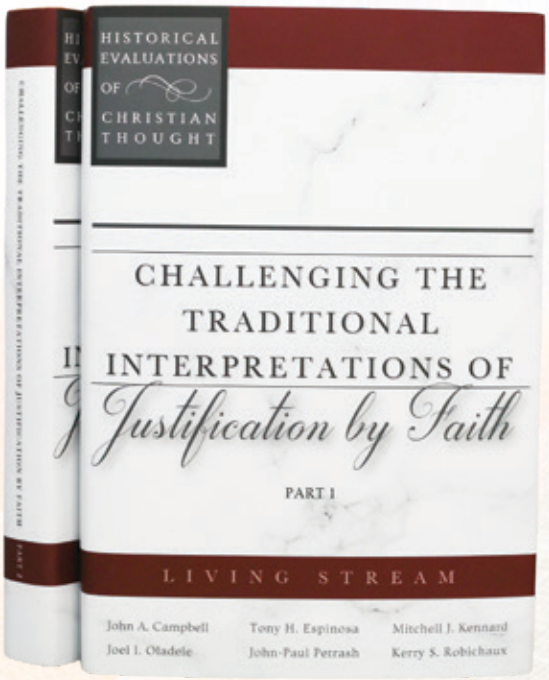

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